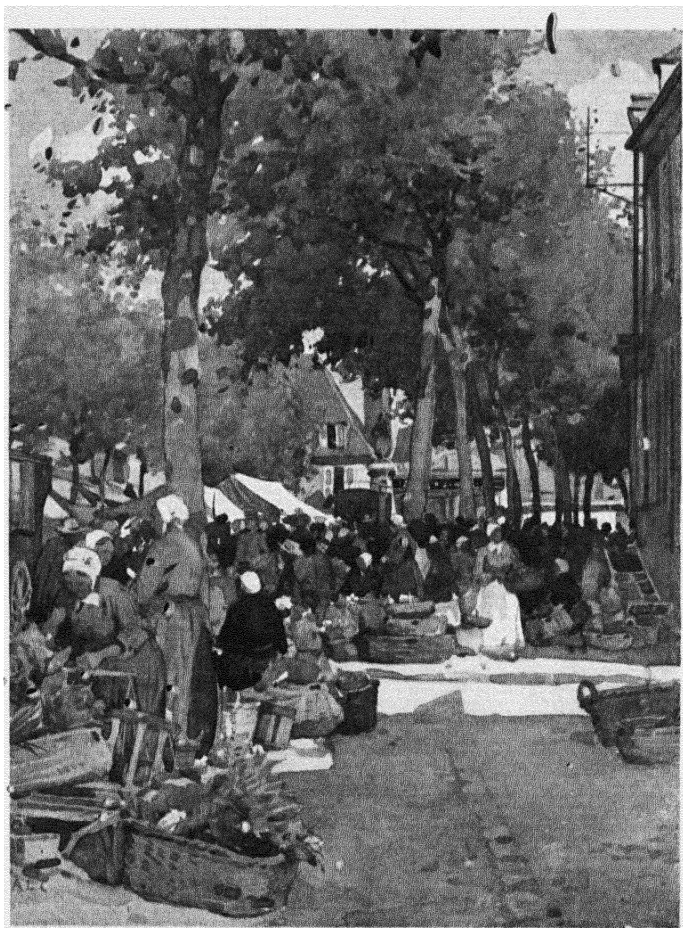


THE LOIRE



IN THE MARKET, COSNE.

THE LOIRE

The Record of a Pilgrimage
from Gerbier de Joncs
to St. Nazaire

BY

DOUGLAS GOLDRING

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

AND BLACK AND WHITE

BY A. L. COLLINS

LONDON

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LA LOIRE

" La Loire est une femme, amoureuse et pâmée,
Mais prompte à s'échapper en des caprices fous,
Sa perfide langueur dort sur les sables roux,
Et baise les contours de sa rive charmée.

" La Loire est une reine, et les rois l'ont aimée :
Sur ses cheveux d'azur, ils ont posé, jaloux,
Des châteaux ciselés, ainsi que des bijoux ;
Et de ces grands joyaux, sa couronne est formée.

" Vous passez votre vie, ô peupliers tremblants,
A la voir s'égarer en détours nonchalants,
Muette, énigmatique, et souple, et lente, et bleue. . . .

" Tels, éternellement debouts sur le chemin
D'une reine, deux rangs d'estafiers, pique en main,
Regardent fuir en serpentant sa robe à queue." . . .

JULES JEMAITRE,
de l'Académie Française.

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Mont Gerbier de Jones, with the Ferme de la Loire in the foreground

INTRODUCTION

WHAT THE LOIRE MEANS TO FRANCE

THE River Loire rises, 4500 feet above the sea, on the slope of Gerbier de Jones, the highest peak, but one, of the Cevennes. After a course of eighteen miles, it enters, as a wild mountain torrent, the department of Haute Loire. At Vorey, below the confluence of the Arzon, it becomes (officially) navigable for rafts. It is classified as navigable for vessels at La Noirie in the gorges of St..Victor, four miles after its entry into the next department, that of Loire. After crossing the unhealthy swamps of the Plaine du Forez it enters fresh gorges, its last struggle with the rocks, from which it emerges at Roanne. It now skirts the department of Saône-et-Loire, and enters that of Nièvre, where its course is diverted in a north-westerly direction by the mountains of the Morvan. Below Nevers it is joined by its first great tributary, the Allier, which is by some considered the main channel. The Allier rises in

the department of Lozère, thirty miles to the south-west of Gerbier de Jones, and at its confluence with the Loire it forms fully two-thirds of the combined stream.

Below Briare, in Loiret, the next department, the river flows between the plateaus of Gatinais and the Beauce on the right, and the desolate Sologne on the left. A curious characteristic of the affluents of the Loire, in Loiret, is that they often flow in a parallel channel to the big river, and in the same valley. At Orléans the stream turns sharply to the south-west and flows towards its most famous province—Touraine—through the departments of Loir-et-Cher and Indre-et-Loire. Below Tours it receives the three important tributaries of the Cher, the Indre, and the Vienne. The confluence of the Vienne marks the entry of the Loire into the department of Maine-et-Loire, where one of its chief characteristics is its numerous long sandy islands fringed with willows and osiers. The river now enters its last department, that of Loire-Inférieure, passes Nantes, and so reaches St. Nazaire and the Atlantic. Below Nantes, to La Martinière, the channel for ships is embanked, and the river here, known as the Loire Maritime, widens between marshy shores, till at St. Nazaire it is a mile and a half broad. Between Le Carnet and La Martinière, a distance of nine and a half miles, there is a canal—the Canal Maritime de la Loire—which enables large ships to ascend as far as Nantes. It was constructed between 1881 and 1892.

It is only to be expected that a river six hundred and twenty-five miles long, the longest in France, should have had a great significance in that country's history. After the termination of the Franco-Prussian War a

writer in the "Figaro" described the Loire as "*le fleuve national*," and the more one examines this description the more it holds good. On its banks have taken place nearly all the great events, certainly the greatest military events, in French history, from the exploits of Jeanne d'Arc to the hopeless but heroic struggle of Chanzy in 1870. Its wide curve separates France effectively into two parts, and it acts as a final, natural barrier against an invading force. As a civilising influence, in the early history of the country, its importance was very great; and from the earliest times until the coming of the railway its course formed the chief trade route and highway of communication between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast. The route ascended by way of the Rhone, crossed from Lyons to Roanne by land, and proceeded down the Loire to Nevers, Orléans, Blois, Tours, Nantes, and so to St. Nazaire and the sea. Strabo, Dion Cassius, and Julius Cæsar make reference to the early navigation of the Loire. The latter recommended his lieutenants, in order to avoid the treacherous sands of the river, to use long boats—*naves longas aedificari in flumine Ligeri*.

In the fourth and fifth centuries the sole rights of trade and navigation of the Loire were in the hands of a close corporation of *Nautes Ligerici*, whose members were spread up and down the river from Roanne to Nantes. Out of this society sprang the "Community of Merchants of the Loire," which appears prominently in the time of Philippe le Bel, though it undoubtedly had the earlier origin indicated. Even in Charlemagne's days it was in full swing, and the Loire Valley was a busy centre of commercial and military

activity, not only for travellers and merchandise going from one sea to the other, but for soldiers of the Empire, moving from the banks of the Rhine to the marshes of Spain.

The Community of Merchants of the Loire grew very quickly to have great power and a wonderfully complete organisation. This organisation was essential, in feudal times, to preserve the trade from extinction, owing to the exactions of the robber barons, whose castles were dotted all along its course. These pillaged the merchants either quite shamelessly or by means of semi-legal exactions—*droits de péage*. The *droits de péage* grew very high in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and were the great scourges of commerce in those days. A great deal, however, was done to improve matters by the concerted action of the rich and wealthy *Communauté*. They succeeded time after time in getting the levies regulated, or in some cases even suppressed; and important acts in connection with the trade were passed in 1577, 1618, 1631, 1724, and as late as 1736, in the days of the Community's decline.

The passenger service up and down the Loire seems to have been highly organised, from an early date. King René of Anjou sailed up it in a galley from Saumur as far as Roanne in 1445; and travelling on the Loire is referred to as a matter of course by such writers as Madame de Sévigné, John Evelyn, and Arthur Young.

In 1780 a regular service of *coches d'eau* was started, and a concession granted "au Sieur Claude Laure." The river, for the purpose of this service, was divided into three divisions, the first being from Roanne to Nevers, the second from Nevers to Orléans, and the third

from Orléans to Nantes, and there were two departures a week each way between these points. Among the different kinds of boats used on the river, and in some cases peculiar to it, were *grands chalands* and *petits chalands*; *grandes toues* and *petites toues*, or *sapines*; *toues cabanées*; *cambuses* (canteen boats); *roanillaises*, *bachots*, and *cabanes*. The majority of these were flat-bottomed. The *sapines* were usually constructed only for one journey downstream and destroyed at the end of it.

Steamboats were early experimented with on the Loire, and a steam service was started between Nantes and Angers in 1823. Six years later this service was prolonged to Orléans. In 1839 a service of vessels, known as "Inexplosibles" because their boilers were so constructed that all risk of blowing up was avoided, was inaugurated. By 1843 there were four companies of steamers on the river, namely, the "Paquebots," plying between Orléans and Nantes; the "Inexplosibles de la Haute Loire," between Orléans, Nevers, and Moulins (on the Allier); the "Inexplosibles de la Basse Loire," between Orléans and Nantes; and a company of "Remorqueurs," between Nantes and Châtillon.

This animation and activity, however, were put a stop to three years later by the action of the railways, who took over all the carrying trade. It was just at the time when the glories of the English canal system were departing, and so many of our canals were being bought up and emptied. From this date the navigation of the Loire has dwindled and dwindled until nowadays the river is practically deserted above Nantes. Its course, too, during the last century, would seem to have become

more sand-choked and dangerous than it was. Expensive works for the regularisation of the flow of water would have to be carried out if the long-cherished scheme of so many patriotic Frenchmen for restoring the river to its former commercial importance were to come to fruition.

The valley now silent, savage, deserted, must indeed present a striking contrast with its appearance a century ago. As Count Imbart de la Tour observes : " Le halage fait le long des rives donnait une grande animation, le va-et-vient des animaux, leur passage dans le fleuve ou les riuaults, les appels et les cris des haleurs, ceux des baliseurs, jetaient une note vive et gaie dans cette vallée de la Loire, si silencieuse à l'heure actuelle." Again : " On ne revoit plus," he says, " de bateaux chargés de marchandises ou de voyageurs silloner son cours ensablé, ni de haleurs ou de baliseurs à la voix sonore ! "

Hardly anything is done to " conserve " the river, now that navigation has deserted it ; a fact which has its dangers. " Le fleuve coule silencieux au milieu de belles et larges plaines ; mais lors de ses débordements, ses flots déchainés viennent rompre ce silence et briser avec impetuosité les obstacles qui se présentent devant eux. Ce ne sont pas des plages à demi-desertes que parcourt le fleuve pendant ses crues, c'est une vallée riche et féconde, ce sont des villes, des ponts de routes qui sont menacés, c'est l'œuvre de vingt générations qui est en péril. Heureusement la Loire, comme l'Amazone, a ses petits igarapés."

In comparing the past and present of the Loire, it is interesting to read what another writer, Coulon, thought of it in 1644 : " Il n'est pas de rivière en Europe," he

says, with more enthusiasm than accuracy, "qui pousse plus loin ses flots, et qui arrose autant de provinces, si ce n'est le Danube, et beaucoup moins en est-il une dont la navigation soit plus favorable et plus avantageuse aux peuples pour l'entretien de leur commerce, et dont les passages soient plus importants pour la conservation d'un grand Etat que ceux de Loyre, qui partage la France en deux parties, et la traverse par le milieu. . . . Il enrichit plus de douze provinces, et baigne plus de trente belles villes. . . ." The greatness of the commerce of the Loire in the heyday of the "Communauté des Marchands de la Loire," is borne out by the songs of the *haleurs*, with which the thronged towing-paths used to echo and re-echo.

"Chantons la Loire et sa marine,
Sur terre, il n'est rien de pareil,
En route au lever du soleil,
Chantons la Loire et sa marine !"

Men who have to do with navigation of any kind, even if only barges, seem to be particularly fond of songs and singing, and the songs of the mariners of the Loire are innumerable. Most of them chiefly consist of an enumeration of the towns on its banks.

"Dames des villes et des bourgs
Nivernaises, Nantaises,
Accourez dans vos fins atours,
Voir les Orléanaises.
Toutes les villes de sur l'eau,
Pays bas et pays haut,
Venez belles marinières,
Venez, ô doux objets charmants,
De toute la rivière :
L'amour au bateau vous attend."

The descent of the Loire nowadays, if it is full of interest, is also full of sadness. So much joyousness,

vigour, and life has vanished from its banks; you pass along a desolate and mournful stream out of which rise, here and there, arid sand-banks. Willows and osiers make melancholy guardians of its sides. There is no trace of the animation of old days. And all down its course is a long procession of crumbled ruins, of decayed strongholds; of towns whose modern commercial activity only accentuates the sadness of the remains of their more glorious past; of bridges which show signs of having been broken and battered in a constant succession of wars lasting even up to modern times. For, as has been remarked already, if the history of the Loire has been one of prosperity and of social glory—and the kings of France resided at different times at Chinon, Tours, Blois, and Orléans, while the valley has always been famous for its splendid châteaux—it has also been a history of almost continuous strife and bloodshed.

A thousand years ago, the Norman pirates sailed up the river and harried the country-side; and they were not the first. After them came the wars with the English, waged along its valley, which ended in our being *hors de France* mis by Jeanne d'Arc after a series of engagements at Orléans, Jargeau, and Beaugency. And there is hardly a town or castle on the Loire which did not suffer in the various religious wars of a century later.

In the seventeenth century came the *Fronde*, one of whose decisive battles was fought at les Ponts-de-Cé, near Angers, and in the eighteenth century there were the Revolution and the war of La Vendée, which made the river purple with blood. Finally came the Franco-Prussian War, in which the last stand of a nation at bay

was made by the hastily raised Armée de la Loire, behind the great water-course. The same towns on the Loire at which the fiercest struggles raged during the wars against the English, came into prominence again in 1870-1. With desperate heroism, Chanzy's hastily raised, raw, undisciplined army opposed the advance of Von der Tann. Near Gien, Cosne, and Beaugency, at Orléans and in its neighbourhood—places sacred also to the patriotic exploits of *la bonne Lorraine*—the most furious engagements were fought. After them the broken army retreated finally behind France's last line of defence—the Loire. The new stone-work on the bridges at Beaugency, Gien, and many other places tells a significant story.

Even now the strategic importance of the Loire is great, and fully recognised by the French military authorities. Once the bridges are broken the South-West of France has an immensely strong natural line of defence.

As for the characteristics of the Loire—its personality—never was there a river with one more peculiar or contradictory. Capricious as a woman, merciless, treacherous, very swift—at times it covers barely a third of its sandy bed, at others it rolls a large, majestic flood round its stately bends and down its long, broad reaches. Its waters, save when made yellow with rain and flood-water, are admirably clear—a quality which the river had in Pliny's time, for in his "*Historia Naturalis*," Lib. IV, C. XVIII, he calls it "*flumen clarum Liger*." Moreover, they are faintly purgative and have the invaluable quality of dissolving soap quickly and being specially suitable for laundry purposes.

In the upper parts of its course the river has eaten

its way through stupendous gorges, which form the heart of some of the most beautiful mountain scenery in France. Then it crosses the Plaine du Forez, disappears again between gorges slightly less savage, and emerges at Roanne to flow henceforward between low banks, or *côtes*, to the sea. Between Roanne and Sancerre it cannot be called strikingly beautiful. Savage, morose, choked frequently with islands or long banks of sand, its appearance has little graciousness, and it is at its best in the flood times, when it has at least the attraction of force. But below Orléans—at Blois and Tours, and again below Ancenis—the river has at all times a magnificence perhaps due partly, in some subtle way, to the magic of association, which no one who has seen it is likely to forget. Innumerable writers have testified to the peculiar effect it has on the observer. “Elle est le moins loquace et le plus indolent des fleuves,” writes M. E. Montégut, “soit qu’elle traîne des eaux paresseuses sur son lit de sables alternativement altérés ou noyés, soit qu’elle submerge ses rives, elle traverse la vallée comme étrangère au spectacle qu’elle baigne.” Count Imbart de la Tour describes it as “Une maîtresse capricieuse et jalouse qui ne veut pas être négligée, et dont il faut sans cesse s’occuper.” Referring to the general appearance of the Loire (poets call it just as frequently “blonde” as “bleue”), he observes: “La couleur des eaux de la Loire varie d’une façon singulière, suivant l’état du temps et les affluents qu’elle reçoit. Sa toilette est variée, passe du bleu au jaune, du vert au noir; c’est le vêtement d’une capricieuse dont la parure est changeante.”

It is not wanting in severer critics. Most writers,

naturally enough, deplore its savage *crues*, which, rising sometimes in as short a space of time as twenty-four hours, are the scourge of the Orléannais and Anjou. Guy Coquille, the historian of the Nivernais, remarks of it : “ La Loire fait grand dommage par son inconstance, car estant sablonneuse, et ses rives estant de terre légère, elle change souvent son cours et son profond, jettant grande quantité de sable és-lieux ou soulait estre le profond, et faisant le profond és-lieux ou soulait estre le sable.”

To take a more modern writer, Henri Beyle (Stendhal) in one of his books has a dig at the river. “ La Loire,” ~~he~~ says, “ est ridicule à force d’îles. Une île doit être une exception pour un fleuve bien appris, mais pour la Loire l’île est la règle, de façon que le fleuve, toujours divisé en deux ou trois branches, manque d’eau partout.” The writer, however, of all those who have dealt with this fascinating subject, who has given the most accurate and suggestive description of the Loire is probably Mr. Henry James, who refers to it frequently in his book “ A Little Tour in France.” In one passage he writes : “ It (the Loire) is a very fitful stream, and is sometimes observed to run thin and expose all the crudities of its channel—a great defect, certainly, in a river which is so much depended upon to give an air to the place it waters. But I speak of it as I saw it last, full, tranquil, powerful, bending in large slow curves and sending back half the light of the sky. Nothing can be finer than the view of its course that you get from the battlements and terraces of Amboise.” Again he says : “ The Loire gives a great ‘ style ’ to a landscape of which the features are not, as the phrase is, prominent, and

carries the eye to distances even more poetic than the green horizons of Touraine." He is speaking in both these passages, it should perhaps be added, of the Loire below Orléans.

For most people, led astray, perhaps, by Joanne's guide to the Loire, which thinks half the river barely worth mentioning, the Loire begins for all practical purposes at Orléans. It is true that save at certain spots such as Sancerre it is not seen at its best between Orléans and Roanne, but at Orléans it has already accomplished more than half its long journey to the sea.

He who follows the Loire's course from the source to the mouth has the experience of travelling right up and through the heart of France, of seeing some of its finest mountain scenery, some of its most desolate plains and, finally, some of its richest territories in that district which has been so often called "The Garden of France." The Loire Valley is an epitome of the whole country. Beginning where Provençal is a language more widely spoken than French, it flows to within a two-hours' railway journey of Paris, then turns westward towards the ancient and powerful capital city of Brittany, Nantes—passing, meanwhile, through a country rich in those wonderful châteaux of the French Royal House and of the French nobility, which have made Touraine famous throughout Europe. Certainly, more than any other river in France, the Loire justifies the appellation of "*le fleuve national*."

THE LOIRE

CHAPTER I

THE SOURCE

SOURCES of great rivers invite discovery just as all mountain peaks seem to utter a silent challenge to the traveller to scale them. I happened to be at Le Puy in the Velay, in a gentle end of May—I had roamed there from Provence by way of Avignon and Lyons—so that to visit the source of the Loire was not to be avoided. It was the one “sight” there was no reasonable excuse for not seeing. Before making the expedition, beyond the fact that it gave its name to the department in which I happened to be staying, the Loire was a mere word to me, without significance, and it had not entered my head that in the future it might be something more. The admirable Joanne, consulted on the subject of the source, informed me that it was on the slope of Gerbier de Jones (5200 feet), which is the second highest peak of the Cevennes. Apparently later in the year it was a recognised excursion, so the hotel people informed me, “but even now, by going to Les Estables by the *diligence*, sleeping there and proceeding on foot in the morning. . . .” I thanked Madame, buckled on my rucksack, and

set out bravely to walk the whole way. I fell first by taking the tramcar to Brives, where the Loire is sufficiently wide and well-behaved to float a crowd of coracles, and even a small rowing-boat. Thence I continued up the long road to Arssac and Le Monastier, in step with a bull-necked man in brown corduroys, his waist girdled by a red sash, with a bottle of wine sticking out of each pocket, who persistently informed me that my destination was *diablement* cold. With the perspiration running from me in a continuous stream I greeted this remark with a cheerful grin; I should have welcomed a few minutes at the North Pole just then. My rucksack already was growing heavy on my shoulders, and I had barely passed the beautiful rocky hill of St. Maurice, whose further side sank steeply to the river-bed, and left behind me the restored castle of Bouzols perched on its commanding rock, when I heard afar off the whirring buzz of the *auto*. I waited, undecided, until it was upon me: then succumbed.

All the windows of the 'bus were shut and it was full, so that the atmosphere can be described only as terrific. A spreading woman in black, with a row of little round buttons down the middle of her flat chest that piqued me to pull them (they were like the stops of a small organ) moved a little on one side, while a very fat Abbé did the same on the other, so between the two of them I was securely wedged.

We were certainly a curious company in the *auto*. Just opposite to me sat a sombre Auvergnat in a soft black felt hat with a broad brim, a black silk tie twisted with the artistic abandon of Chelsea, black overall and

trousers. He had black hair, eyebrows, moustache and imperial, grey-green eyes, and his cheeks were warmed to a rich brown by sun and exposure ; but his expression was curiously stony. One could imagine him stolidly flogging his wife in moments of domestic discontent. Next him, on the left, was a bearded satyr, of a *commis-voyageur* (in wines) whom I was to meet later on ; and on his other side sat a Zouave, invalided home, who was perspiring freely in his heavy *jupe-culotte*. Besides these, there were a number of rather drunken peasants in blue blouses, and a shy tout whose "line" was cheap enlargements of photographs, in ~~lustrous~~ gilt frames. But the most singular individual of them all turned out to be the Abbé, in whose squashy flesh my elbow—quite against my inclination—was proving something of a thorn.

Priests, like women, are apt to have extremes of qualities, good or bad, and on the rare occasions when they happen, for instance, to be rude, they are nearly always frightfully rude. This priest's rudeness was beyond superlatives: he positively lashed the company with his inquisitiveness. He interrogated the Auvergnat and the commercial traveller first, demanding their names, ages, places of birth, destination, and average attendance at Mass, absorbing the information freely accorded to him, with a series of non-committal grunts. Then he tackled the Zouave; what was the matter with him; where was he going? Amiable and well-mannered, like the majority of *militaires*, the Zouave explained that he had a bullet wound in his shoulder which refused to heal, and that he had in consequence been invalided home, to Le Monastier.

"A bullet wound!" roared the Abbé. That was, nothing, once the bullet had been extracted, and, soldiers always recovered quickly; to do so was, in fact, their business. The Zouave flushed a little, and seemed uncertain whether to lose his temper or to faint; and while I was trembling—so far as exigencies of space allowed me a tremor—lest this redoubtable Abbé should turn and begin again on me, the *auto* entered the rough street of Le Monastier, and drew up suddenly outside its "bureau."

I emerged limp and reduced in bulk, having a lively sympathy just then with the survivors of the Black Hole of Calcutta, and staggered rather than ~~walked~~ into the little draper's shop which served as office for the *courrier*, to pay my fare. While I was picking up my change from the counter, I felt suddenly soft hands fumbling at my shoulder. Noticing in a looking-glass opposite that they belonged to a tall girl with bright cheeks and dark active eyes, who wore a little round lace cap on her head, I allowed them to continue, not without excitement. Eventually they succeeded in unhooking my rucksack, for that apparently was their object, and once possessed of it, their owner walked to the door, announcing laconically, over her shoulder, the single word "Déjeuner."

She went, taking great strides with her long legs, and, spellbound, I followed. I would have followed her anywhere, but after crossing a road and turning a corner, our destination turned out to be a little shabby inn—the "Hotel Ponsonaille"—under the shadow of the church.

My captor hung my rucksack on a peg and ushered me through the dark outer room into the parlour where the

Other guests were already seated at a round table. This
evidently was the house—there is always one in every



Scene at Le Monastier—Market-day

little town—for commercials; without them what
would the traveller do in out-of-the-way parts of France?
The “commercial” always sees that his food is abun-

dant, good, and cheap. All the company were *commis-voyageurs* except myself and the inevitable young German couple. On my arrival the feast began; napkins were tucked into expansive necks, and the polite buzz of "Servez-vous, Monsieur," mingled with the ceremonial filling of one's neighbour's glass. Chance threw me next to the elderly bearded gentleman I had observed in the *auto*. He started talking at once of wine and love. Was I married? No,—then how was I travelling? Blushingly I admitted that it was unaccompanied, and he lay back in his chair and shook with laughter. "Ah," he said, "but your women are not amorous. It is very different here, eh, *ma chatte!*"—he added, addressing the girl who was replenishing the wine bottles. He ogled her with rather bleary eyes—winking to me, as a hint that he had a terrible way with the women—and was greeted with the "snub distinct," most neatly administered. He then forsook the divine passion and took to politics, accusing me in his discomfiture of having taken his Egypt, of casting envious eyes on his Morocco. I assured him that as far as I personally was concerned, Egypt was a mere name; I had taken it from no one, and as for Morocco, he was welcome to it, if he could get it. He clutched his beard furiously, and looked as if he meant to fight it out with me, until a deprecatory chorus of "Steady! it is the *entente cordiale* now, you know," brought about a sudden change of front. The thunderstorm passed over, he called for two more bottles of wine, filled my glass, and his own, drank my health, and proceeded to do business. He represented a house at Dijon, the finest, etc. etc. Might he send me a *barrique*, half a *barrique*,

of this wine, or of this ? I fancy I ordered enough wine to float an ironclad before I could escape, but, thank Heaven, I forgot to give him my address !

There were some hours to wait before the cart started from Le Monastier to Les Estables, so that I had an opportunity of exploring thoroughly the town where Stevenson spent "about a month of fine days," and ended his stay by purchasing the *ânesse* Modestine. Its local importance—though it contains less than four thousand souls—is considerable, for it forms a centre for the wild, inaccessible districts that surround it on all sides. Its situation, some fifteen miles from Le Puy and three thousand feet above the level of the sea, under the crest of a rocky hill at the head of the green valley of the Gazeille, is remarkably fine, but the town itself, like many upland towns in Great Britain no less than in France, is squalid, dirty, and unprepossessing. The houses—the old practically undistinguishable from the new—are built of black lava-blocks stuck roughly together and roofed, as all villages are roofed in this district, with red tiles. Seen from some distance away, the town looks its best—you miss the squalor that a close inspection reveals—and in the brilliant sunshine, the group of dark, bright-roofed dwellings, nestling in its vivid green setting on the side of the rock-crowned hill makes a charming picture. I did not get this general view, however, until later, and my first impressions of the town itself—as I walked up and down the one long untidy main street, turned into narrow alleys covered with filth and hardly wide enough for a pedestrian and an oxen-cart to pass at once, or prowled across the naked squares full of garbage, dirty children, and adventurous

pigs—were that it was “picturesque” rather than beautiful. It is not, however, without interesting buildings, of which the most important is the church, with its “striped” Romanesque façade. It contains a fine Renaissance chapel, some curious frescoes, and the relics of St. Théofred (locally St. Chaffre).

Behind the church is the more considerable of the open spaces, which has, in the middle, a green tree. At the top of it is a long arcaded building, once part of the monastery from which the place takes its name. This monastery was founded in the seventh century by St. Calmin, but largely reconstructed in the eighteenth century—1754, to be exact. The buildings are now used for various municipal purposes. Further back still is the castle of the abbey, dark and massive with its bulging round towers. It has been turned into a dwelling-house, has windows knocked in its walls, and is covered with a “cottage” roof of red tiles. Outside it is another dirtier open space, the Place du Foiral, where a sheep and cattle-market is held. It slopes uphill, and is adorned by a fountain and a stone cross. Higher still, dominating the castle and the town, is the line of red, craggy rocks of La Moulette, that burst like jagged bones out of the smooth green turf.

In the narrow main street there are one or two houses which from their carved-stone doorways and pediments seem to suggest that the town has seen better days. At one time, before Richelieu’s work of centralisation was completed, it was a kind of mountain capital for the surrounding gentry, and Stevenson, I fancy, records somewhere that one dashing gentleman lost

his entire fortune here in high living. It is difficult to see how on earth he could have managed it.

I have said that the town was unprepossessing, but, looking back, I find that it was nevertheless pervaded by a certain quiet gaiety, a quaint brightness, not at first scizable, caused by the presence of the lace-makers.



Lace-makers, Haute Loire

Almost every available woman and girl in the whole of the department is, when lace is in favour, a *dentellière*. Certainly at nearly every window and open doorway in Le Monastier, a group of them could be seen, dressed in their picturesque caps, their active fingers moving quickly over the cushions, among the bright-coloured clattering bobbins. Lace-making is a handicraft demanding so much skill that it attains almost to the

dignity of a fine art, and the practice of it lends a touch of nobility to squalid surroundings, and has, besides, this quality of cheerfulness, to which I have referred.

Avec les mains, la langue aussi travaille.

On prie, on chante, on dit son petit mot

Sur l'œil voisin dont on cherche la paille,

Et, du pied gauche, on berce le marmot. . . .

For these mountain-dwellers, imprisoned until modern times in their narrow stone cottages for nearly half the year, its cheerfulness no doubt was an important factor in its favour.

Another local industry is the making of sabots, and I remember looking into a long, dark shop, filled with rows of gleaming new sabots—elegant ones for small and dainty feet, and massive ones for the heavy—and seeing the artist at his work, with his spectacles half off the end of his nose.

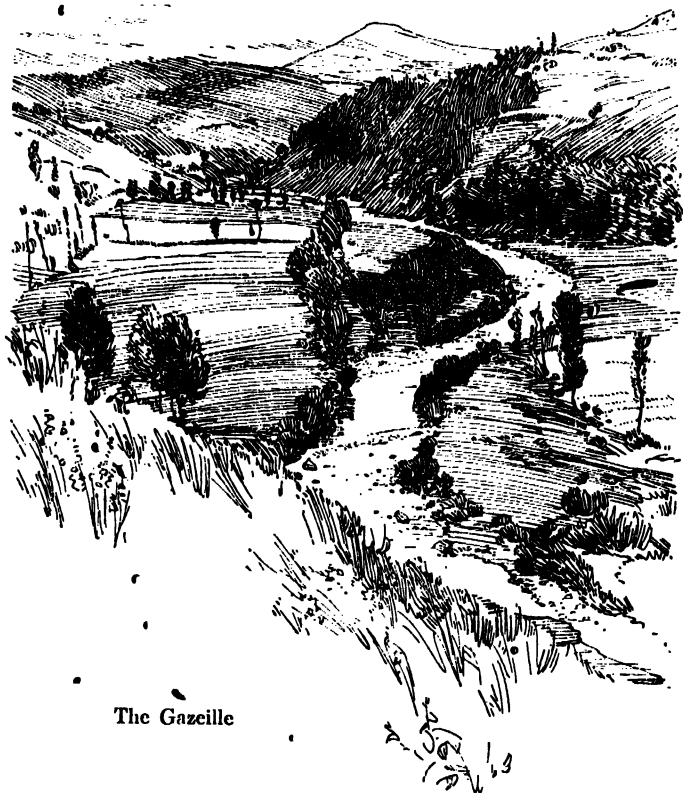
Some good examples of the lace made locally are to be seen in a small church at the far end (towards Ardèche and away from Le Puy) of the main street, where all the altars and statues of the saints are draped with it. This is a lovely little twelfth-century building, dedicated to St. Jean, and not considered worthy of mention by Joanne. It is cool as a crypt, with naïve painted images in every corner, and wooden forms to sit on; while through the open door at the west end is heard the soothing plash and tinkle of running water. There is a little plateau outside, bounded by a low stone wall which grows warm in the sun and is favoured as a place of meditation by the old men. Here you can sit and watch the brook for miles, as it tumbles from one rocky ledge to another, down the green valley. Stevenson, in a discarded first

chapter to his "Travels with a Donkey," makes the following observations about the general aspect of the countryside, as seen from this spot :

"The mean level of the country is a little more than three thousand feet above the sea, which makes the atmosphere proportionately brisk and wholesome. There is little timber except pines, and the greater part of the country lies in moorland pasture. The country is wild and tumbled rather than commanding; an upland rather than a mountain district; and the most striking, as well as the most agreeable, scenery lies low beside the rivers. There, indeed, you will find many corners that take the fancy, such as made the English noble choose his grave by a Swiss streamlet, where Nature is at her freshest, and looks as young as on the seventh morning. Such a place is the course of the Gazeille, where it waters the common of Le Monastier, and thence downward till it joins the Loire; a place to hear birds singing; a place for lovers to frequent. The name of the river was perhaps suggested by the sound of its passage over the stones, for it is a great warbler, and at night, after I was in bed in Monastier, I could hear it go singing down the valley till I fell asleep."

The *courrier* to Les Estables, which starts from a very modest inn half-way up the street, was a common affair compared with the dashing *auto*, which links Le Monastier with Le Puy within an hour. It was a small cheap-looking wagonette "fitted up" at home, with a rough deal box inside the splash-board to hold the parcels and the letter-bag, and drawn by a ragged, bony, bay horse that gave the impression that it was unable to bend its knees. There were four other passengers

besides the driver and myself, and far more luggage than would go into the wooden box. The driver, brown-eyed and mild-looking, with a caressing voice, was popular in the village. He walked along, holding his



The Gazeille

whip high up and using it as a walking-stick, and stopped to gossip at every doorstep on the way. His English passenger seemed to be the chief subject of conversation. I heard him time after time repeat the fact of my nationality, my intention of sleeping at Les

Estables, of visiting Gerbier de Jones, and each little group of lace-makers paused in their work to examine me with a frank interest that was altogether without offence or suggestion of ill-manners. It took very nearly an hour to get out of the town, the passengers walking all the way, like the driver. It was on foot, indeed, that we made the greater part of the journey, for not even the most inhuman traveller would have subjected our sorry nag to a heavier load than the driver, the wagonette, and the packages. Indeed, for a great part of the way I energetically pushed.

For the twelve miles between Le Monastier and Les Estables the road climbs up a beautiful valley, in the midst of which rushes and falls a cold, clear torrent. A very amiable, intelligent peasant who walked next to me—he turned out to be the innkeeper of a tiny hamlet about half-way on our journey, which may account for his amiability—impressed upon me that it was full of trout. At this hamlet he and another passenger got down. It was a squalid collection of hovels, and the young woman who came to meet my friend of the trout carried in her arms a baby whose face was swollen and blotched with boils, and who had infected its mother by kissing her. The sight made my heart sink. I must confess that I nearly turned back, and would have done so had not the brilliant sunshine seemed to assure me that, if the worst came to the worst, I could sleep out of doors.

The two passengers who, with me, were continuing to the end, were a young married couple dressed in deep black—the woman gay, talkative, and intelligent, with some of the polish that comes from being a domestic

servant in a pleasant household; the man morose, with a light moustache and blue eyes. It seemed to be his wife who was the native of the place; the man perhaps was merely going to pay a formal visit to his mother-in-law. They both seemed very clean and civilised to be going to such a wild part, and I was reminded faintly of Bel-Ami's visit to his parents in their rough Normandy home.

The higher we got, the barer and more treeless became the valley. But the grass slopes near Les Estables were of a most brilliant green, lit up here and there with the rich gold of the *boutons d'or* (king-cups), the paler tint of the daffodils, or the radiant blue of the *violettes bâtarde*s. Later in the year, the vivacious young wife explained to me, there were great blue expanses of irises and also of the true violets, which grew round Les Estables in great quantities, together with many kinds of medicinal herbs. In this cold district, however, everything was two months behindhand, she added.

And how bitterly cold, too, it was suddenly become—after the burning, blazing day! The wind rose and whistled over the slopes which, as the sun sank, became more and more bleak. All round were the fantastically shaped peaks and cones of the Cevennes. In the dawn of the earth's history, this particular district appears to have suffered from violent and prolonged volcanic upheavals, during which the liquid lava poured from the craters in a molten stream, cooled and hardened into the monstrous shapes and patterns that the landscape now displays. The Mézenc itself, the highest point of the Cevennes (5750 feet), is the least peculiar in shape of any, and from a distance, from the side of Les

Estables, its contour is not unlike a typical English down.

The village of Les Estables, when at last we reached it, was beyond description desolate. Its squalid stone houses—house and cattle stall in one—stood as close as they could get to one another, with their backs turned to the sweeping winds, from which there was nothing to protect them. The village street was covered with slime, dung, and large stones, making it difficult for the exhausted horse to drag the wagonette even as far as the inn where its feed awaited it. The only building larger than a hovel—besides the uninteresting modern church—was the combined Mairie, National School, Post and Telegraph office, which stood half-way up the street and just opposite our stopping-place. According to Joanne, the village contains over a thousand inhabitants, though it is hard to see where and on what they live. That there must be some considerable coming and going, however, was proved by the inordinate number of “hotels” the place contained, each one of which looked more forbidding than the last.

The chalet of the Syndicat d’Initiative du Velay is a little way out of the village on the bare slope of the Mézenc, and I have never set foot in an inn with greater thankfulness. I was horribly cold, and—it must be owned—suffering from “the blues.” I envied the married couple (from whom I parted affectionately and with regret) their warm greetings and homely welcome. The *salle-à-manger* of the chalet, admirably clean and hygienic, was utterly lugubrious, reminding me of the sanatorium at school, when no one else was *æger*. The woman, too, who waited on me had all the air of supe-

rior cleanliness and capacity that is characteristic of a "matron." She laid my dinner at one end of the long table, and brought me a very small lamp that just illuminated my end of the room, and then left me to eat my chill and solitary meal. I should perhaps have screamed if there had been anyone else but herself, her husband, and daughter to hear; but there wasn't, so I ate instead. A great brass horn on the sideboard faced me during the meal, and suggested—unwilling mountaineer that I was—a whole nightmare of possibilities. I found no solace afterwards in the back numbers of unreadable journals, in the organ of the T.C.F. (that admirable institution), nor in the two odd volumes of Chateaubriand's "*Génie du Christianisme*," which, with a very dull visitor's book, formed the library. I went to bed soon, and as I emptied my pockets on to the dressing-table I made the discovery—*culminating* point of misery—that I had lost the gold coin on which I was relying to last me until my return to Le Puy. It was no good searching for it—it was gone. After I had paid my bill in the morning I should have less than two francs between me and starvation. And to-morrow was Ascension Day, a public holiday. If I wired, I should not be able to get an answer, as the office would be shut.

I lay awake for hours in bed, listening to the wind howling and screaming outside, wishing with all my heart that I were back in some pleasant lowland where it is always afternoon, and cursing heartily the Loire for having such an inaccessible source. . . .

In the morning, at a few minutes before five o'clock, a haggard explorer, in pyjamas, with chattering teeth

and dishevelled hair, "might have been seen" pulling aside the curtain of his bedroom window in the Châlet du Mézenc. No sooner, however, had this been accomplished than his teeth ceased to chatter, and his spirits rose like mercury. For the sun was up—*O sol pulcher, O laudande!*—and those bare, dismal slopes, across which the wind had swept the night before, were now the most beautiful and vivid green, and looked under the clear blue as though they might have been the pasture lands of Paradise. On one side waved a pale acre of daffodils, large violets in the more sheltered places reflected the azure of the sky, while in the marshy ground by the streams the *boutons d'or* made a rich golden splash. As quickly as could be I breakfasted, and before seven o'clock I was well on the southward road towards Gerbier de Jones, with the large sum of francs 1.70 in my trouser-pocket. But the air was too sparkling and keen to allow such tedious thoughts as ways and means to bother one.

The hill-slopes all round Les Estables are quite bare, covered with short rich grass, flowers, and herbs; but with the larks singing high up in the heavens, and the sun glittering on a hundred little rivulets distilled from the snow that lingers in the sheltered clefts, they had a rare beauty of their own. I met a curious family just outside the village, disposed on two horses. The two girls rode astride on one of them, and the man and his wife on the other. They looked dour and sombre, and were dressed in their holiday black, the only spot of colour being in the elaborate caps of the women, the white "tails" of which fluttered in the wind. After crossing the brow of a low hill which now

hid Les Estables from sight, I passed the border into Ardèche. The scenery changed. On the right, at the bottom of the slope, was a dark pine wood; on the left, under a small cliff, was a little sandy pond into which poured innumerable rivulets. The country on both sides of the road became increasingly wooded, and after about another half-hour of steady going I saw all at once—nestling at the foot of a thick coppice of beech and fir trees that grew up the hillside below me, to the right—in a lovely green cup, surrounded by steep grass slopes, the picturesque ruins of La Chartreuse de Bonnefoy. These consist of a confused mass of fallen and crumbling masonry, the square tower of the church in good preservation, the walls of the nave and chancel clearly defined, an ancient round tower half demolished, and the high wall of what appears to be a façade dating from the early part of the eighteenth century. There is another mass of ruined buildings—containing many rooms half underground, still in good preservation—down by the brook (the Veyradeyre) that skirts the monastery on the farther side. A tall, shuttered house, built apparently out of the loose stone from the ruins, stands at one end of them facing an open space of grass land, and on the slope of the hill, immediately below the road, is a long, massive stone barn.

A native who emerged from this building, after throwing two stones with admirable aim at a couple of dogs who looked as though they meant to tear me to pieces, gave me permission to look round, and informed me that the tall stone house was a cheese factory. I thought the Chartreuse de Bonnefoy the most “romantic” ruin—in a Waverley novel and Mrs.

Radcliffe sense—that I had ever seen. Falling off a crumbling wall into a hole in the lower part of the ruins, I found myself in a perfect network of passages and stone cells. At the far end of one of the darkest of them was a small rivulet that ran into a black, cavernous hole. Not having a match with me, I threw a precautionary stone before going further, and it fell some thirty feet away with a loud “plomb” that must have indicated a considerable depth of water. Under the level of the church there was another long series of underground vaults into which it would have been possible to climb, but in peering down through the round hole that led to them I thought I discerned cheeses in the dim light, and reflected that probably they were connected by an underground passage with the factory. In any case, I left them unexplored, and with soiled clothes and barked shins, feeling at least ten years younger, after an adventure that the “Boy’s Own Paper” itself could not have surpassed, I climbed up again, by an overgrown and decaying pathway, into the main road. I sat and rested on a bridge over a small waterfall, and looked down for a few minutes at the dark ruins in their verdant setting, unwilling to leave them. A peasant, who stopped to talk on his way into Les Estables, told me that the property, including the cheese factory, was owned by a gentleman “four or five times a millionaire,” and that the destruction of the monastery had taken place in the “Religious Wars.” Which of the several religious wars that have been waged in that country was responsible, he did not make clear. Joanne remarks that the monastery was founded in 1156 by one of the Seigneurs of Mézenc.

From this point could be seen one of the most curious of all the odd-shaped cones of the Cevennes—it had a high, rocky summit, but looked as though its final peak had been cut off clean with a knife, leaving the top absolutely smooth and flat. The road now encircled the base of a hill and passed through a fresh beech wood, and in the sunshine the bright green leaves seemed to shimmer and twinkle like fairy things. As I walked farther into Ardèche the scenery became still more varied and astonishing. There were deep wooded gorges, hill-slopes at once precipitous and tree-covered; vistas of a seemingly unending sea of billowy peaks; rushing, laughing streams; rocks of a curious greenish tint that looked as though they were entirely composed of some kind of metal that luckily had escaped the notice of the mining specialist. After a mile or two, during which the road had seemed to be leading in a wrong direction, it doubled straight back on its tracks on the other side of an intervening hill (which it had been encircling); passed a farm; then traversed another and thicker beech wood where the leaves of the trees were only just beginning to shoot, and crossed an open level of woodland where some cattle were grazing. Here the road turned to the left, and the châlet at the foot of Mont Gerbier de Jones came into view.

For some way back I had noticed the sharp peak of the Gerbier de Jones without realising its identity. The slim "aiguille" of rock that looked in the distance almost as though you might encircle it with your arms, seemed hardly to merit the dignity of being called a mountain. When examined more closely, however, its

curious peak, which has been compared in shape to a pine-cone, exacts respect. It is astonishingly abrupt and alone and individual, rising straight up, sharply, out of its surrounding pastures. The ascent is very painful and unpleasant, owing to the sharp, loose stones with which its sides are covered, but, if accomplished, should not take more than a quarter of an hour. From the top lies spread out before one, the most extraordinary, panoramic view (surpassing that from the Mézenc), which is to be had in what is one of the strangest districts in Europe. Mountains, plains, gorges, woods, pastures, rivers: a hundred miles of France whose modelling is like that of a stormy sea, with range after range of hills stretching like waves arrested in their course, and petrified into immobility. The Alps, the Cevennes, the *Sucs* of the Velay, Mont Pilat—are all to be seen, while seven hundred feet below, begins, a tiny trickle, the longest river in France. . . .

The chalet at the base of the mountain, as I had been warned, was not yet open, and being exhausted through want of food, I called at the farm just below it, which is known as the “Ferme de la Loire”—my heart beating rather quickly now that I had at last reached the object of my journey. I found the farmer swilling out his dark, cavernous *écurie* with water that poured cold and sparkling from a wooden pipe that he held in his hand, but he received me hospitably, and led me through into an even darker kitchen and living-room, where an old, motionless woman was sitting, with closed eyes, at the table. While I was refreshing myself with some cheese, black bread, and sour red wine, the farmer told me his news. It had been so bitterly cold not more

than seven days ago, that to have gone out would have meant almost certain death! (Not till then did I realise what it meant to live at an altitude of over 4500



The Source

feet.) I was the first, he told me, to visit the mountain in 1911.

But, unable any longer to conceal my impatience to

hear about the Loire, I asked him eagerly how far away was the source, explaining to him that I had come specially from Le Puy to see it. With an unexpected dramatic sense, with a touch of awe almost, he pointed to where the water could be heard gurgling out of the pipe which he had dropped: "There," he said, "you have it in my stable. That is the veritable source of the Loire!"

It was an emotional moment. We stood up. I wondered whether a toast of some kind should be drunk, and not knowing exactly what to do, I walked out and examined the baby river that was to grow so huge (and in the winter such a terrible monster), as it wound its several hundred miles through the heart of France to the sea. To the sea! Suddenly the idea came to me, and pouring the refreshing water over my hands and face, I registered a little vow that I would follow it from this point till I could follow it no more. I would go on a pilgrimage from Gerbier de Jones to St. Nazaire! I explained my resolution to the farmer, and we shook hands in the cool twilight of the stable. Then I walked out into the sunshine and started on my way.

CHAPTER II

GOUDET

DOWN the green squashy meadows I went, among the dappled cows, with something of the exaltation of a fanatic. It gave me a simple pleasure to leap across the tiny stream from time to time, though this feat, even before the farm was lost to sight, became impossible. Within a mile from its source, just below a tumbledown stone cottage roofed with thatch, the Loire is joined by a much more considerable stream that rises near the Chartreuse de Bonnefoy, and is called locally the Aygue-Nère (Eau-Noire) from the black lava rocks over which it runs. This, according to M. Joanne, who shares the infallibility of Bacdeker, is the true and longest branch, though the other has the name, and will assuredly keep it. In any case the two streams together form a brook "too broad for leaping." It was a beautiful spot. The doubled stream made a clear, shallow pool about thirty feet wide, overhung on the left-hand side by beech trees. At the back rose the curious stone nob of Gerbier de Jones, unique in its startlingly original effect. A little below this point, at the first bridge, by which is an old wooden sawmill, the traveller to the nearest village, Ste Eulalie, must leave the river bank, to which the road has hitherto closely kept, and follow the road uphill, taking the turning to

the left when the roads branch. Ste Eulalie, the first village on the Loire, is a small, red-roofed place with an inn or two and a brand-new post office. It stands in a lovely fresh setting, and is rather less squalid in its general appearance than many of these higher villages, a fact which is perhaps accounted for by the importance of its annual *Foire aux Violettes*, held on the 12th of July. Here come chemists, perfumers, and merchants from Lyons, Nîmes, Marseilles, and Grasse, to buy the Mézenc violets and all kinds of herbs used in the manufacture of scents and essences, and particularly the herb called *pensées sauvages*. The true violet of the Mézenc is large and of a splendid deep purple, and has a lovely perfume. It grows in great profusion and luxuriance, and the villagers from all the hamlets round flock to the fair, each with his sweetly-scented basket full of the dried flowers. The gathering takes place either at the end of May, or in the first fortnight of June, according to the nature of the spring, and the flowers are then dried under cover, away from the sun. Unfortunately the year was so backward that the true violets were hardly out, so that I did not see the country in the glorious purple robe that it was to wear within a fortnight. From what I could gather from the *patron* at the inn who told me about it, I should imagine the scene on July 12th would be well worth visiting.

From Ste Eulalie, I was advised to go by the good road to Issarlès, and there pick up the Loire again. The river meanwhile flows south and west until at Reikutord (a hamlet named after this *volte-face*) it turns suddenly to the north, and winds among wild gorges and basaltic rocks to Issarlès. Alas, this good road to

Issarlès, admirable as its surface was, turned out to be one of the barest and most desolate ways it has ever been my lot to tread. For miles I could see it stretching in front of me over the grassy slopes, making wide and inexplicable curves. My attempt to cut off one of these corners, to take a bee-line, left the curves in the road no longer inexplicable, for very soon I found myself nearly up to the knees in bog. After this accident I met a tiny maiden of about six summers with large eyes that seemed perpetually wide-open and unblinking, like big, dark glass marbles. She was driving cows with a stick (and hitting them as hard as ever she could), and had a little back as straight as a princess's. I asked her how far it was to Issarlès, and she took a finger out of her mouth, opened her eyes wider than ever, regarded me with a slow smile, and said nothing. My heart sank; or it may have been another part of my anatomy, for I had had nothing to eat beyond a scanty breakfast at Les Estables, and the hard crust of bread and cheese at the Ferme de la Loire. My throat was parched; my blistered tongue hung out like a dog's, and my general appearance must have been singular. Perhaps I got rather light-headed, but, in any case, I began to dream little dreams about a car filled with really nice English people, that in a minute or two would overtake me. I carried on long, witty, imaginary conversations. Never have I met such charming, such sympathetic people as that comfortable automobile contained! I could feel myself leaning back on the soft cushions, feel the caress of the cool breeze on my forehead as we raced back to Le Puy. . . .

Unfortunately there came no thrilling "toot-toot"

to spoil the harmony of the landscape and race me back to comfort and a cold bath. My dreams, however, had made the kilometres fly, and by the time I "woke up," I saw the red roofs of Issarlès clustering round the spired church in the deep valley at my feet.

As it was Ascension Day and a general holiday, all the men of the village were seated along their garden walls in long, black lines. The girls and women sat in the doorways of the cottages in their most elaborate caps, and sometimes stood in groups across the road, engaged apparently in some kind of game. My appearance caused a positive convulsion of excitement. I felt like the Piper of Hamelin, as I marched down the village street to the inn, with a throng of girls and boys and young men at my heels. The *patron*, however, who was standing in the road, dispersed them when he saw a customer, and led me up a rickety wooden ladder on the outside of his house—the "Hôtel du Château Blanc Cineys"—to the parlour, which was immediately over the stables. Here I bartered my last coins for a hunk of bread and a bottle of Beaujolais that tasted like nectar. It was now about three o'clock in the afternoon, and I was getting rather tired, and for the first time the question of where I intended to sleep began seriously to perplex me. I studied a map. There were a dozen villages I could get to, but they were not on the Loire. The only main road marked seemed to lead me back to Monastier, where I had no intention of ignominiously returning. To such places as appeared to be on the banks of the Loire—Salettes, Vielprat, Arlempdes, Goudet—there were no roads. The name of one of these villages, however, took my fancy, attracted me for some

inexplicable reason, though it was the farthest away and apparently the most inaccessible. Soon—for these fancies grow like mushrooms—the thing became an obsession. If I died for it, I must get that night to Goudet. . . . I asked the landlord : he had never heard of it. Then I tried him with Salettes, which was on the way. Salettes he knew, but he impressed on me that it was impossible to get there, as there were no roads, “Whereas le Monastier.” . . . Silently assuring him that I would see him damned before I would go to Le Monastier, I went out to make inquiries elsewhere. Two natives that I met on the road consulted together with violence in Provençal when I asked for Salettes, and then turned to me, speaking with agitation in a barbarous, creaking French. Salettes was over there—they pointed away beyond a hill that rose on the other side of the valley—but there were no roads, and as I was a stranger to the country, I had “far better follow the *route* to Le Monas . . .” I thanked them, and started out for Salettes.

To take a bee-line in England, where there are easily recognisable landmarks, and the country undulates mildly and is never too much up and down, presents few difficulties save from farmers and gamekeepers. In the Cevennes, however, your bee-line (as I was to discover) is apt to become an unending circle. I began by leaving on my left the blue lake of Issarlès. This beautiful tarn is round in shape, has no apparent vent, and no stream running into it, and is yet teeming with trout that must breed elsewhere. It is over three hundred feet deep in the middle, and its waters are always at the same level. It is situated under the

- crater of Cherchemus, and is itself an ancient crater.
- By its position it commands the three valleys of the Gage, the Veyradeyre, and the Loire. The latter winds less than a mile to the south and more than three hundred feet below its level. Below Issarlès, the Loire receives the Gage and the Veyradeyre, and almost immediately enters the department of Haute Loire being still at a height of 3000 feet above the sea and less than twenty miles from its source. Clear and swift it runs through a wild gorge, whose greenness is sometimes contrasted with the red of the basalt rocks, passes Salettes perched above it on a steep cliff, absorbs the Mézeanne, passes between precipitous crags at Arlempdes, and so winds down to Goudet.

I take this information at second-hand from Joanne, as I was unable to follow the river-bed. I struck out to cut off a corner and reach Salettes (and ultimately Goudet). I crossed first a broad moorland plateau, covered with firm tufts of tall grass that one had to use as stepping-stones. Roaming over the moor were droves of cattle, dogs, and small children who knew no French. The dogs certainly understood no English, for when I ordered a creature yelping at my heels that was plainly some relation to a wolf to "lie down," he merely waited till my back was turned and proceeded to bite me in the calf. I talked to the dogs, after that, with a small rock in either hand, and they understood me better. After crossing this moor I got into a rough, stony road—the first of the *Vieux Chemins* that were to cause me so much agony—passed some isolated farms, and made sure I was within a short distance of Salettes. I came at last to a most lovely gorge, at the top of which, on my

right, was a village. At the bottom of the deep cleft, whose almost precipitous sides were covered with pines, laughed and chattered an abundant brook. Flowers grew wherever they could find a spot, and the song of the birds seemed a natural expression of the twinkling sunlight. Avoiding the village, with a topographical cunning on which I prided myself, I plunged down into my fairy-valley, walked anyhow, just as I was, across the brook, climbed up the steep hill on the other side, and walked on till I came to another hamlet, and asked with confidence for Goudet. Before the young man I had questioned would answer me, he subjected me to a searching cross-examination. What was I travelling "in"?—articles of alimentation? Wine? But no—since I was going to Goudet, so noted for its trout—it must be *articles de pêche*? I left it at that, for I found him as difficult to understand as he did me. I remarked on my inability to follow the *patois*, adding, with a sudden inspiration of politeness, that *his* French was, however, quite Parisian. He blushed all over his face with pleasure, assuring me with modesty that he had only been educated "*comme paysan*," that his French was far from good, and that I must not flatter him. For anyone with so meagre a command of French as myself, this little dialogue had its humorous side; its object, however, was abundantly gained. My young man walked with me a mile on my way to Goudet, and pointed out the two *futaies* in the distance, between which I must pass. On our left, some two miles off, in a broad deep valley, was a large, superior-looking village, with a good road running through it, which he told me was Pradelles, a name that seemed vaguely

familiar. He urged me to go there and give up Goudet, but I was quite firm, partly because I remembered Young's strictures on the inn. The passage runs thus : "The inn at Pradelles, kept by three sisters Pichots, is one of the worst I have met with in France. Contraction, poverty, dirt, and darkness." When I looked at my map my heart sank. Pradelles was miles out of my way ! Seeing that he could not move me, he said good-bye, and shook me warmly by the hand, and had I encouraged him, would no doubt have embraced me on either cheek. I pushed on wearily for the two *futaies*, crossed between them, came to another valley and another hamlet. Here a curious group was collected outside the door of one of the houses. A dark-haired man, very big and strong, aged about fifty, was seated on his doorstep, surrounded by girls, young men, women and children—about a dozen in all—who sat on the ground in a circle round him. He was speaking in a loud, harsh voice. I thought at first he was drunk and abusing them, but when I came nearer I made out that what he was saying had a kind of rhythm ; he seemed to be declaiming. I passed up the street, anxious not to appear inquisitive, but his eyes were fixed on me, and when I got past, he roared out to know why. I did not stop to listen when he was speaking ! There was something patriarchal about the whole scene even for one who had no Provençal : for a person learned in the *patois*, with an interest in folk poetry, it would doubtless have had far more significance. •

The women of this village misdirected me with one accord, but I was brought back from the wrong road by a kindlier man of brigandish appearance, and started

once again upon a *vieux chemin*. These ancient roads are to be found all over the Velay. They are impossible for carts and barely possible—so rough are the great boulders with which they are strewn—for pedestrians. With aching feet I went on up and down hill, through tiny hamlets with all the women and girls sitting making lace in the doorways, and sometimes singing to one another, until at last, in the late afternoon, O blessed sight, a broad white highway appeared in front of me. Gaining it, I saw about a mile further down, a village on a high plateau, dominating the Loire; evidently this, at last, was Goudet! To make quite sure, I asked a farmer's wife, who was driving home the cattle for the night. "Ah, non, M'sieu'," she said, "c'est Salettes. Faut prendre le ch'min qui monte." . . . Accursed woman, accursed Salettes, accursed road that mounted! The sun was now just setting, and having completed over twenty-five miles of rough going, I felt that I had walked enough, but the necessity to reach Goudet became even more pressing. I got on to yet another *vieux chemin*, and staggered on under the shadow of a low rocky hill, with a pine forest, dark and mysterious, on my right. It was very lonely, there was not an animal stirring on the hillside, and in the gloaming the contours of every object in the landscape were outlined with an exaggerated distinctness. It was a perfect evening, but that did not prevent each kilometre seeming to me like five miles. I became aware that if Goudet did not present itself within half an hour, I should fall in a heap by the wayside like a sack of old bones. And it just did present itself. The path emerged on to an open plateau, giving a view of a vast amphi-



GOUDET.

theatre of hills surrounding a valley a thousand feet below. Then it dropped to a pine wood, plunged precipitously through it, and emerged at the foot just outside a little sheltered village nestling by the Loire, which here made quiet brooding pools reflecting all the fading gleams in the sky. In the pine wood I had passed two lovers, climbing up hand in hand, but down here in the long white street not a soul stirred. It was like a charmed village in a dream-world; and to me, dearer than any El Dorado. In the western sky a green radiance flushed with rose, lingered still, and the first faint stars were alight and glowing: the evening seemed to be catching its breath, hushed and expectant, and my footsteps echoed in the silence till, after passing up the long, straggling street, I reached the end of the village and the little square.

In the *Place*, beneath the green spreading tree in the middle, there stood one individual, the first I had so far encountered in the village. He was in his shirt sleeves with a black limp hat on his head, and was looking up at the stars. When I approached I expected him to turn on me some strange unearthly countenance. I was not quite sure just then whether the whole thing were not a dream. He was human enough, however. Was this Goudet, I asked, and was there an inn? It *was* Goudet, and he pointed in front of him, to the inn. "The other one," he said, "I keep myself. It is just below, there." He pointed towards the river, but without emphasis, being scrupulous to leave the choice entirely to me. Naturally I chose *his* inn, blurting out, as I accompanied him towards it, that though I had not a sou in my pocket, I was nevertheless reliable. He heard me

gravely, looked at me carefully, and when we arrived, asked me in. We stumbled into a dark kitchen, and I was invited to sit and also to remain covered. A lamp was lighted and placed on the table between the *patron* and myself. He proceeded to examine me. In those moments I fancy I experienced much the same emotions as a prisoner on trial for his life. My heart thumped, and my tongue literally clave to the roof of my mouth. Eventually, after an examination that seemed to me interminable, he pronounced judgment. "But yes, I can see you are *bon garçon* : you shall have whatever you want." He called his wife, a young woman in black, with a clean white cap and a bright, rosy, but slightly wrinkled face, and told her that I was very tired ; that some dinner must be prepared for me, and the best bed. Then he stood up and lifted down from a high shelf laden with liqueurs the familiar green bottle with its silver-papered neck, and label with the Helvetian cross upon it, and with his own hand prepared me my first and stiffest Pernod. Absinthe is no doubt a poison, but how miraculously reviving it is in small doses ! While my dinner was being got ready, a visitor dropped in who might perhaps have been a small farmer or a lawyer, for he could read English he told me ; he was a charming, well-informed man of about sixty, with a grey imperial, and keen grey eyes. He was greatly interested in my pilgrimage, and seemed to think it characteristic of my country. He had once before seen an Englishman at Goudet, many years ago, when he was a boy. He was travelling with an *ânesse*, and had written, subsequently, a book !

For dinner, Madame Bonhomme—for so my hostess

was called—managed to provide me at very short notice with quite a number of dishes; the one I remember best was the black carcass of some small animal served on hunks of bread soaked in the juice. I think it must have been cat, at least the numerous other cats that roamed about the house wore a distinctly decimated look. I fell asleep immediately after helping myself to a delicious fried trout, and only woke up on hearing a sharp “splosh” followed by a scuffle, to see the decimated cats bolting it as hard as they could gobble. Taking pity on me, kind Madame Bonhomme conducted me with a candle to my room, which was outside the inn, over the stables. It was spotlessly clean and comfortable to a degree Elysian, and there, full of gratitude, I slept the clock round. Amiable Monsieur Bonhomme; most gracious and hospitable Madame! May others do unto you as you did to me. I should like to give you a small advertisement, but until your Government make a few more roads, I fear it will not much avail. At all events, let me put it on record that the Hôtel Rivet, Goudet, près Solignac, Haute Loire, besides being clean, comfortable and as cheap as anyone could wish, is admirably situated alike for trout fishers and for artists; and that *pensionnaires* “are taken.” Friends please accept this (the only) intimation.

CHAPTER III

LE PUY EN VELAY

IT was ten o'clock and the sun was burning down on the white roadway when I emerged from my apartment at the Hôtel Rivet, after a (necessarily) exiguous ablution. Madame Bonhomme was striving to do up her little daughter's petticoats, the *patron* was moving about among his animals, and in front of the inn door four or five goats were breakfasting off piles of Narcissi laid out on two low wooden forms. Nothing could have been more peaceful, and only the most urgent necessity roused me to the effort of moving on. My hosts set before me bread and cheese and a bottle of thin ungenerous wine—a simple meal, but seasoned with the kindness of its providers—and I set off to clamber “retrospectively” along the side of the stream to Arlempdes, the next village, three miles higher up. I started by rounding the base of the steep pine-clad hill I had come down the night before, and all the way to Arlempdes the scenery was of the wildest. The Loire was not yet a river, but an untrammelled mountain torrent. It was very rough going, but I would not for anything have missed it. Arlempdes is a small village, about the same size as Goudet (500 inhabitants), but still more inaccessible. It is well worth visiting, however, for the beauty of the gorge at this

spot, and for the ruins of its castle. This great mediaeval fortress, dating from the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, is flanked with large towers alternately round and square. Its situation is magnificent, for it is perched on a steep basaltic rock sheer above the river. From its ramparts I remember reading in a local guide-book that the Cadet de Séneujols hurled the Huguenot captain, Chardonnat, into the Loire; another reminder, like the grim ruins of the Chartreuse de Bonnefoy, of the fierceness of the religious wars in this district. I did not struggle on to Salettes, of foul memory—though I heard it was three times as large as Arlempdes, and situated on a commanding hill that slopes almost precipitously down to the river. I had conceived an overpowering repugnance to that place, and let it be, returning by a long détour to Goudet.

Below Goudet, the Loire receives the waters of the Ourzie, up whose course is a lovely waterfall, the Cascade de la Baulme, and its basin enlarges into the beautiful valley of Solignac. Below Cussac, the village next to Goudet, an immense landslip which occurred in the eighteenth century interrupted the course of the river and formed, for the time being, a large lake. The river winds now at the base of Mont Malpas—near which are some very beautiful “pavés des géants”—flows through the village of Coubon within sight of the castle of Bouzols, and round the foot of a lovely rocky hill, the Mont St. Maurice, to Brives.

It had been my intention to continue following the course of the Loire down to Brives (Le Puy), but meeting in the village the gentleman who remembered Stevenson, I discussed the matter with him and was dissuaded.

He assured me there was nothing of interest, at all events between Goudet and Coubon, and added that, speaking as an old mountaineer, though he had done it once, he would not care to do it again. As my feet were torn and bleeding, and I had already had experience of most varieties of rough country to be met with in the Cevennes, the last consideration was perhaps as strong as any.

On the following morning at an early hour I set off for Le Puy, very sorry to leave my kind friends at the Hôtel Rivet, but not sorry to be returning to money and baths. In the village Square I found that the amusements of the day had already started. A solitary gipsy caravan, undersized and painted green—dragged apparently by a raw-boned horse that moped over some meagre tufts of grass—occupied the central position under the tree. The owner of the caravan (a man with a red face and sandy hair) and a dark woman, with powerful lungs, were airing their little disagreements, while, watching them, seated on the low stone wall which bounded the square on the side looking on to the river, sat in a long black line, the élite of Goudet. The gipsy woman with the lungs again and again expressed herself in forcible terms; after each outburst the red-faced man beat her phlegmatically over the head with a thin, white, newly-peeled stick. The blows and screams resounded throughout the village. "Society," sitting on the wall, remarked "How shocking!" at decent intervals, and continued looking on. In the bottom of their hearts they saw nothing unnatural in this method of taming a shrew; it is quite possible that the shrew saw nothing unnatural

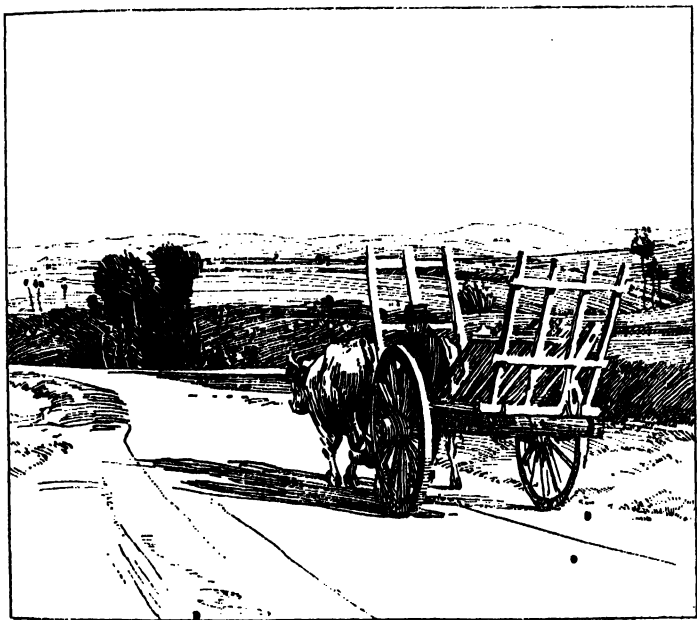
in it either ; while the frank publicity of the correction seemed to rob it of half its unpleasantness. Alas ! the advent of the policeman and the Parish Council have robbed village life, in the more civilised countries, of much that in old times made it picturesque. At the risk of seeming insincere, I must admit that I enjoyed the little scene enormously. It was eminently healthy ; it was conducted in the sight of all men, and no doubt the woman's beating did her good. Scolds, though tolerable in a mansion, are unpleasant everywhere, and in the confined space of a caravan . . . Beat on, untrammelled, brave gipsy—most admirable disciple of Nietzsche—and don't care a hang what the neighbours think ; there are many far meaner and less effective ways of punishing a shrew than giving her a healthy, bracing beating ! Stevenson, I discovered later, when I came to search his works for references to Goudet, observed a tendency to "free" speech in the village, for in the suppressed chapter of his "Travels with a Donkey," which was published after his death in the "Pentland edition," he mentions its cheerful outdoor abusiveness. "Of all the swearers," he writes, "that I ever heard, commend me to an old lady in Goudet, a village of the Loire. I was making a sketch, and her curse was not yet ended when I had finished it, and took my departure. It is true she had a right to be angry, for here was her son, a hulking fellow, visibly the worse for drink before the day was well begun. But it was strange to hear her unwearying flow of oaths and obscenities, endless, like a river, and now and then rising to a passionate shrillness, in the clear and silent air of the morning." He came down

into Goudet from St. Martin-de-Fugères by the road up which I painfully toiled to leave it, and he describes the view I had of the village when I turned, like Lot's wife, to look back.

It was on a Sunday, and Stevenson had been making a few characteristic remarks about the "Sabbath," and his sympathy with it. "In this pleasant humour I came down the hill to where Goudet stands in a green end of a valley, with Château Beaufort opposite upon a rocky steep, and the stream, as clear as crystal, lying in a deep pool between them. Above and below you may hear it wimpling over the stones, an amiable stripling of a river which it seems absurd to call the Loire. On all sides Goudet is shut in by mountains; rocky footpaths, practicable at best for donkeys, join it to the outer world of France; and the men and women drink and swear in their green corner, or look up at the snow-clad peaks in winter from the threshold of their homes in an isolation, you would think, like that of Homer's Cyclops. But it is not so: the postman reaches Goudet with the letter-bag; the aspiring youth of Goudet are within a day's walk of the railway at Le Puy; and in the inn you may find an engraved portrait of the host's nephew, Régis Senac, 'professor of Fencing and Champion of the two Americas,' a distinction gained by him, along with the sum of five hundred dollars, at Tammany Hall, New York, on the 10th April, 1876."

I climbed about half a mile up the steep road to St Martin-de-Fugères, and paused to look back at the scene described above—to take a last look at my beloved Goudet, nestling under the hills, with the river

running in front of it, between broad expanses of white, uncovered stones, silent witnesses of the yearly *crues*. There were the two ruined castles of Goudet and of Beaufort, facing one another on steep rocks between which the river flows, and further on, the white suspension bridge. At the back and all round were the pre-



An ox-cart in the Cevennes

cipitous pine-clad slopes. It was a lovely picture. Just by Goudet the river makes two long, cold, deep pools, the water filtering from the one to the other through a broad expanse of stones. Afterwards it runs through a deep gorge, and gets so narrow that one could almost leap across it; then flows between a broad uncovered stretch of sand, and so out of sight.

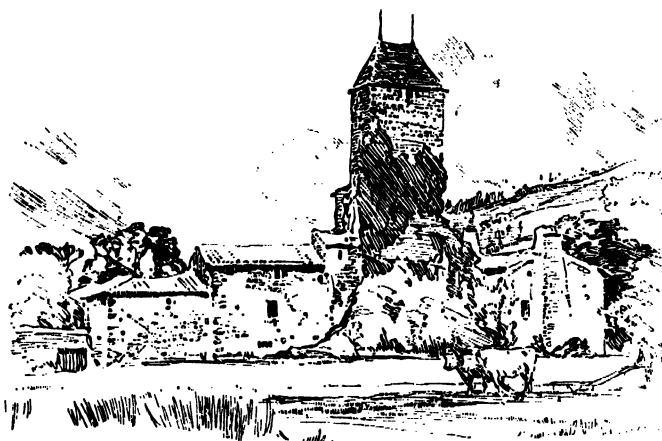
The road turned now away into the village of St. Martin-de-Fugères, and from this time onwards, until I reached Coubon, I saw no more of my river.

St. Martin is not a village of surpassing interest. It is perched on a high plateau above the narrow and romantic gorge which is the Loire valley, and it possesses an accessible public pump. Many persons might visit this village without discovering this fact; to me, however, parched by the broiling sun and without a penny in my pocket, it had a special appeal. At ten o'clock in the morning, on the 27th of May, 1911, the natives of St. Martin were regaled with the astonishing spectacle of a foreign young man kneeling down in front of the pump, with head bent on one side under the spout, clasping its waist with one arm, and with the other sending a stream of water over his sun-baked countenance and (occasionally) into his mouth. They came and stood round in numbers, with mouths agape, but respectful, as before one who was evidently saying his prayers to an unknown god. The water that trickled off my face ran delightfully down my back and all over me, under my clothes, and refreshed me as nothing else could have done. I set off with renewed vigour, after eating some bread and cheese from my coat pocket, along the now excellent road to Chadron (which has a ruined castle), which I reached after crossing the Colanse, a torrent full of fishes, which joins the Loire a little below St. Martin. After leaving Chadron, I went on, uphill again, till I met some peasants, who urged me to take the short way to Coubon, by following the "Vieux Chemin," which leaves the main road just by an old stone cross

above Chadron. My experience of these "vieux chemins" should have taught me to be wary, but in my anxiety to get quickly to Le Puy I plunged down it light-heartedly, and was soon in agonies. I have never rejoined a main road with greater thankfulness than I did that white, dusty road above Coubon. Not only had my feet been cut and bruised, but I had had to carry a small boulder in each hand, most of the way, as a warning to sheep-dogs. Once bitten——

Coubon itself is an attractive, rather large village, dominated by the castle of Bouzols, which is situated on a magnificent rock, overlooking the valley, has been recently restored, and is now once again inhabited. At Coubon the road crosses the river by one of the handsome narrow suspension bridges which are a feature of the Loire. Its pillars were placarded, when I crossed it, with notices about the "Retraites Ouvrières et Paysannes," and fierce declarations to the effect that begging was forbidden in Haute Loire. From Coubon to Le Puy, there are two roads, one through the village of Taulhac, frequented by motors, and dusty; and the other following the course of the river down to Brives, where the electric tram completes the journey. I chose the latter, staggering, in my enthusiasm, over the rough stones by the river-side. The water, even here, covered only about one-third or one-quarter of the river-bed, but it required very little imagination to realise what a large flood would be poured down in winter from the hills. The stream wound under the base of the rocky hill which a peasant woman pointed out to me as the Mont St. Maurice, and on every side was a magnificent mountain pano-

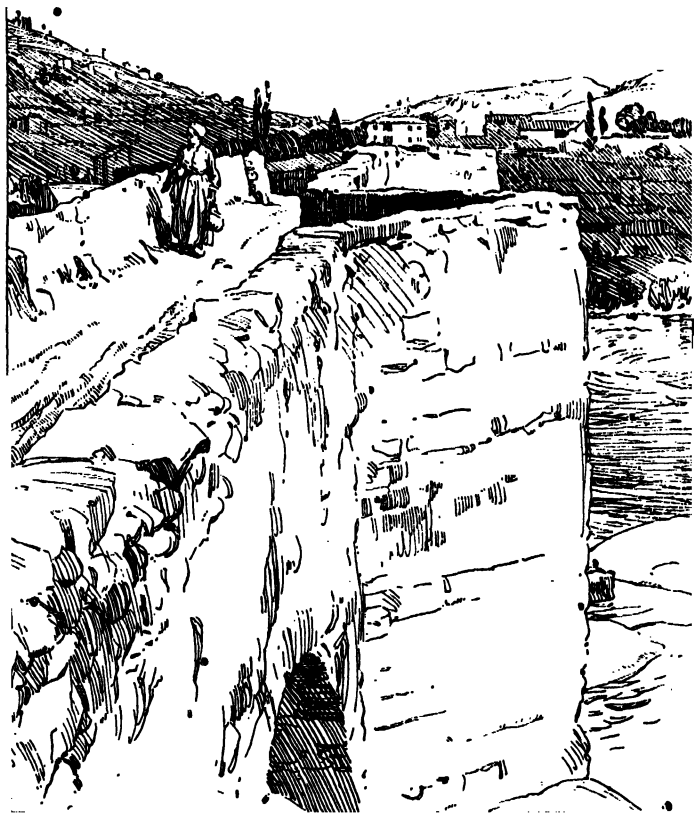
rama. About half-way towards Brives I noticed a large farmhouse, that looked to be of an almost immemorial antiquity. It was partly carved out of the living rock, and almost ruinous in places. In form it was a quadrangle, surrounding a farmyard littered with straw and dung, and at one end rose an ancient tower. The oxen teams were ploughing the broad meadows all round, as they might have



Old farm near Coubron

been doing a thousand years ago. The curious, rather sinister building is one of the most interesting that I can recall in Haute Loire. Further on, past the farm, the river-bed widens out still more, leaving a great expanse of stones, then rushes down a slope into a deep reach formed by a *barrage*. On the left-hand side a deep channel has been made, to work a large new mill, and Brives can be seen in the distance. At Brives are two arches of an old bridge which was destroyed by one of the celebrated *crues*,

and a good modern bridge which bears the tramway. Here are indefatigable laundresses beating their soapy



The bridge below Brives

washing-boards, and little flat punts, like boxes, controlled by long "natural" poles. The river is broad here, and banked up to make navigable reaches; while

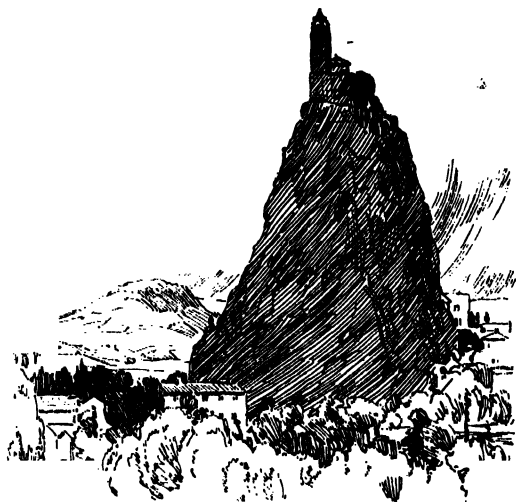
below the new bridge, on the right-hand side, I saw actually a rowing-boat. Save for these few hundred yards, one could not see where it was to be used; for except just here the river was impossible even for a canoe. About a kilometre below Brives is a charming mediaeval stone bridge, under which the water runs swift and deep. It leads across to an old Carthusian monastery, and is so narrow that there is barely room for a cart and a foot-passenger to pass one another on it. Climbing up towards Le Puy from the old bridge, one saw from the highest point of the road an extraordinary panorama of hills and mountains, one rising behind the other, each peak clearly outlined and of an odd, individual shape suggesting that it had been modelled intentionally by the thumb of some giant artificer. It seemed impossible that Nature could have designed anything so "human." The nearer hills had all bright stretches of the greenest pastures and cultivated fields among the black rock patches, sometimes up to the very summit, and on all the lower slopes the red roofs of the houses were thrown into sharp contrast by the meadow land.

I was more dead than alive when I got into Le Puy, exhausted for want of food and with a parched tongue, but I finished strong, up the long road leading to the post office. The subsequent joys of being shaved, of bathing, and of drinking deep draughts of iced beer I leave to the imagination of all walkers. Those were moments of bliss, and the joy of complete rest after violent effort has shed a glamour, for me, over Le Puy, which I have no doubt is undeserved. Mr. and Mrs. Pennell, —to the delight of the local Syndicate of Initiative,

who quote it on the front page of their handbook—described Le Puy as the “most picturesque place in the world,” and wrote about it in the “Century Magazine,” so that no doubt it has points which have escaped an untrained and less observant eye. The two sharp, rocky knolls that stand up, without warning, in the midst of it, are certainly surprising. But only one of them, the “dyke” de St. Michel d’Aiguilhe, gives a pleasant surprise. The larger of the two, the Rocher Corneille, which is in two stages, the second being a flat plateau of rock, has been utilised to give publicity to the foulest terra-cotta-coloured statue of the Virgin and Child—“Notre Dame de France”—it would be possible to imagine. It was erected, in 1860, with the bronze of 218 Russian cannons captured at Sebastopol. This odious and ill-proportioned, patriotic labour haunts one all over Le Puy.’ You cannot lift up, your eyes unto the hills without being made to lower them hastily, with groans. Some true patriot should be found to pay it a visit on August 15th, the day of the great yearly pilgrimage, with a small bomb in his pocket.

The “Rocher d’Aiguilhe,” however, is entirely charming. You go through a gateway in a very humble quarter, the faubourg d’Aiguilhe—a commune, by the way, distinct from Le Puy—and after making a donation to the guardian of the door, ascend to the little Romanesque Chapel at the top, by a winding staircase. The chapel, which has been restored, is said to have been built A.D. 962. Its little western façade is delightful, and considered one of the most charming examples of Byzantine-Roman architecture in the Department. The doorway is richly carved, but the tower of the little church is dis-

pleasing. It would be far more effective, certainly from below, if it had no tower, and that seems to have been a later addition. From the doorway you mount several steps to get into the church proper, which is bare save for an altar surmounted by an angel holding a banner, and flanked by two other angels with offertory boxes. All over the altar, the statues, and the banner, and over



Rocher d'Aiguilhe, Le Puy

every inch of wall, the names of innumerable French tourists—pious pilgrims, no doubt—have been scrawled. Outside there is a path leading round the church through the ruins of some older building, from which a superb view may be obtained. Through the stillness comes the constant splashing of the Borne, the little river that skirts the base of the rock, and runs through the town to join the Loire. And in the distance on two sides are the green slopes of the hills, and the bright red roofs

of isolated *berons*; while on the remaining sides lie the red-roofed town with its two open spots—the Place du Breuil and the Place Michelet—the Cathedral and the Rocher Corneille. Looking straight down the dizzy precipice there are blue irises and bright yellow wall-flowers growing in all the crevices of the rock, increasing the impression one has that the whole rock with its little church is a jewel of an exceptional beauty, a kind of collaboration between God (or Nature) and man, to produce a certain effect.

Le Puy is a great centre of the cult of Our Lady, to whom, in addition to the lamentable statue which now forms the objective of the pilgrims, the beautiful Romanesque cathedral at the base of the Rocher Corneille, is dedicated. The Cathedral is reached by climbing up sixty steep steps—La Montée des Tables—one of which bears the celebrated inscription, in lettering of the twelfth century :

“Ni caveas crimen, caveas contingere limen,
Nam Regina poli vult sine sorde coli.”

On the left are the interesting cloisters, built in the eleventh or twelfth century, of marble and many-coloured stone, with round arches and elaborately carved capitals. The interior of the Cathedral, its doorways and the curious buildings which surround it are full of interest. The high altar has a small *vierge noire*, the replica of a Pagan idol of great antiquity resembling a nigger doll, which was destroyed at the Revolution. The original doll was said to have been brought by Louis IX from the East, and had an Egyptian appearance. The superstition certainly brought great wealth to the church of Le Puy, which for nearly a

thousand years has been specially associated with the Madonna, and a place for pilgrimages.

In one of the side chapels may be noticed a fresco unearthed by Prosper Mérimée. This fresco of the "Liberal Arts" is a mural painting of the fifteenth century, representing Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, and Music, by groups of persons. Each art is represented by a beautiful lady, symbolising the art itself, and by a worthy gentleman who has made his name renowned by the exercise of it. The fresco, which seems to indicate the presence of a vigorous mediaeval school of painting at Le Puy, has unfortunately been injured by the colour-wash, under which Mérimée discovered it.

Le Puy contains many quaint old houses and narrow, mediaeval streets. Among the buildings that should be noted are the old stone archway, leading out of the rue Parnasse into the narrow rue Philibert, some old houses—especially Number 51—in the rue Pannessac, and the Escalier Boiteux near the Cathedral. At night when the Aiguille and Rocher Corneille are lit up, the appearance of the town is curious and beautiful.

Everywhere throughout Le Puy the lace-making is going on incessantly—every able-bodied woman of the poorer classes throughout the district seems, indeed, to be engaged in it. It is a picturesque occupation, a handicraft which has almost the dignity of a fine art, and the women, old and young, who exercise it have many curious customs which have survived, like the ancient headdresses and costumes, the devastating spread of "education."

The lace-makers have their own societies, which still gather in the summer outside the cottage doors, and in

• winter in the kitchen of the head-woman, La Béate, whose official designation—for she is recognised and paid by the State—is “Dame de l’Instruction.” Even the tiniest hamlet has one of these officials. Her house is surmounted by a distinguishing bell-cote and has two floors, the lower consisting of one large room, used as a school, chapel, and meeting-room. The children who work in the fields all the summer, attend school in the winter at the house of La Béate, who teaches the girls the use of the bobbins. In summer her house is used as a *crèche* by the women working in the fields, who deposit their babies with her. In addition to these duties, La Béate nurses the sick, closes the eyes of the dead, and acts as general friend and counsellor to the neighbouring cottagers.

The lace-making industry, so important to this district, was in the past frequently injured by unwise laws. In 1547, for instance, the Parliament of Toulouse promulgated a sumptuary law which forbade anyone save nobles to wear lace, for a curious reason, namely that it was impossible to obtain domestic servants in Le Velay because all the maids were engaged in lace-making. The edict caused great distress, until S. Francis Régis, a Jesuit who came into Le Velay on a preaching mission, realised its unwisdom, and hurrying to Toulouse obtained its repeal. His memory is in consequence still green throughout Le Velay, and his tomb at Lalouvesc (where he died December 31st, 1640) still receives streams of pilgrims. Haute Loire is now the most important lace-making centre in the world, doing a very large trade, particularly with America.

The streets of Le Puy seem to be perpetually full of

beasts. Never was there a town with so frequent a cattle-market. The Place du Breuil and Place Michelet, the two open plains that stretch out from the long main street, are constantly filled with a tossing sea of horned heads; and the lowing of oxen and the sound of blows and shouts, as the black-clothed farmers move about among the cattle, can be heard far off. It is impossible to walk down the streets without meeting one or more teams of yellow oxen, with mild, pathetic eyes and white muzzles, their heads yoked together by a heavy block of wood, being driven along by their owners. Le Puy is essentially a market-town for a rude mountain people, the centre of an industry peculiar to places where all means of communication used, until recently, to be closed for months at a time, and, like nearly all the villages and smaller towns in the district, it is black, squalid, and unprepossessing. To be sure, on a bright sunny day, it is pleasant enough. There are hotels, a large new barracks, and a clean-looking liqueur factory. But let the day be overcast, and a bleak wind whistle down the long street and across the Place du Breuil and the Place Michelet, and one sees the town in a truer light. It is essentially bleak, accustomed to sheltering from the cold behind thick stone walls, without any of the smiling luxuriance of more favoured parts. Its beauty is the beauty of the storm, of Nature at her most magnificent and awe-inspiring. The mere work of man has been dwarfed and discouraged. No, in spite of Mr. and Mrs. Pennell, and many others, I must confess I found Le Puy antipathetic. Here, however, I ought to quote some contrary opinions. Says Maurice Barrès: "Le Puy est à mon goût, la ville la plus sédui-

- sante, la plus étrange, la plus rare de France.” I can
- understand the use of the last two adjectives, but not



Market scene, Le Puy, Haute Loire

the first. Georges Sand has written in one of her novels ("Le Marquis de Villemer") a tribute to the district, as

admirable as it is true, though it cannot be taken as an encomium of the actual town of Le Puy :

“ Rien, mon ami, ne peut te donner l'idée de la beauté pittoresque de ce bassin du Puy ; et je ne connais point de site, dont le caractère soit plus difficile à décrire. Ce n'est pas la Suisse, c'est moins terrible, ce n'est pas l'Italie, c'est plus beau ; c'est la France centrale avec tous ses vésuves éteints, et revêtus d'une splendide végétation : ce n'est pourtant ni l'Auvergne, ni le Limousin que tu connais. Ici, tout est cime et ravin, et la culture ne peut s'emparer que de profondeurs resserrées et de versants rapides. Elle s'en empare, elle se glisse partout, jetant ses frais tapis de verdure, de céréales et de légumineuses avides de la cendre fertilisée des volcans jusque dans les interstices des coulées de lave qui la rayent dans tous les sens. A chaque détour anguleux de ces coulées, on entre dans un désordre nouveau qui semble aussi infranchissable que celui que l'on quitte ; mais quand des bords élevés de cette enceinte tourmentée, on peut l'embrasser d'un coup d'œil, on y retrouve les vastes proportions et les suaves harmonies, qui font qu'un tableau est admirable, et que l'imagination n'y peut rien ajouter.”

Young, with his usual accurate eye for landscape, thus corroborates Georges Sand : “ Nature in the production of this country, such as we see it at present, must have proceeded by means not common elsewhere. It is in all its forms tempestuous, as the billowy ocean. Mountain rises beyond mountain, with endless variety ; not dark and dreary, like those of equal height in other countries, but spread with cultivation (feeble indeed) to the very tops. Some vales sunk away among them,

of beautiful verdure, please the eye. Towards Le Puy the scenery is still more striking from the addition of some of the most singular rocks anywhere to be seen." He adds later that "the whole country is volcanic: the very meadows are on lava; everything, in a word, is either the product of fire, or has been disturbed or tossed about by it."

These are both excellent as attempts to describe natural beauties, which are astounding, haunting, delightful, but neither says anything to contradict the suggestion that the town of Le Puy is in itself odious. Frankly, after I had luxuriated in the barber's shop, drunk a good deal of beer, and forwarded my postal order to M. Bonhomme, together with an epistle of thanks (in the oddest of dog French, which must have caused surprise in native bosoms), I was glad to get away.

Le Puy is not greatly blessed—it is really one of its advantages—in the matter of railways. To get to it from Paris, the best way is undoubtedly to take the nine o'clock express (when it is running) from the Gare de Lyons, which reaches Lyons at 8.19 p.m.; and then to proceed, by a cross-country journey, to St. Étienne, and from St. Étienne to Le Puy, leaving the former place at 6.22 p.m. and arriving at Le Puy somewhere about ten o'clock at night. It is the only way of getting to Le Puy in one day.

The trains out of the town are either inconveniently early or inconveniently late, and as the country is delightful, there can be no better means of progression than on foot.

A commercial traveller, who poured out my wine for

me one night at dinner—a little dark man in a shiny, black tail-coat, with a round stomach, inflated like a football, and a way of putting his hat on the back of his head and sticking his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, reminiscent of Mr. Gus Elen—besought me to stop at Vorey. He recommended the hotel of the widow Maleysson, where he assured me I should be comfortable. We had a glass of Verveine together afterwards—it is a kind of local Benedictine, white, fiery, but not unpleasant—and he insisted that this was excellent for the stomach, and “pas cher, pas cher,” meaning that he did not mind if he did. I remembered noticing that the Loire was classed as “flottable” from Vorey onwards, and as the place had a pleasant-sounding name and seemed a reasonable day’s march from Le Puy, I decided to start for it at seven o’clock on the following morning.

CHAPTER IV

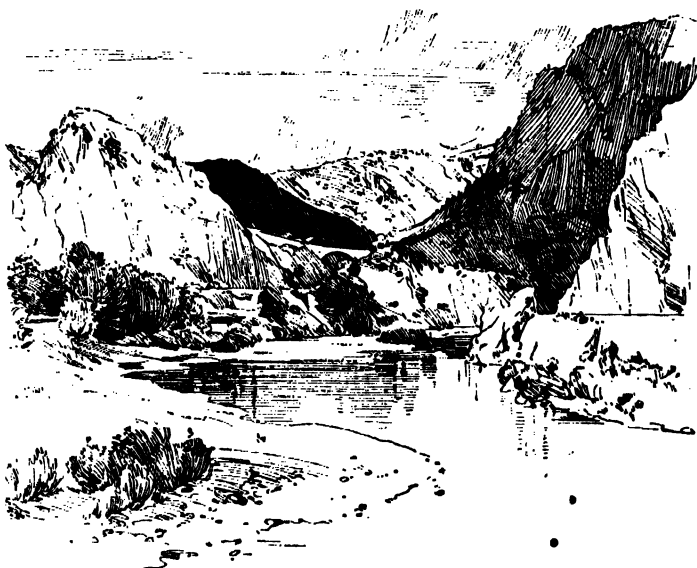
VOREY

IT was a fine day, and I set off cheerfully down the faubourg St. Jean, leaving on the right the road to Brives which crosses the Borne. I had not reached Chadrac, however, before it occurred to me to turn off to the left to visit the castle of Polignac, which is situated on a magnificent flat-topped rock with precipitous sides. It is the most important mediaeval fortress in the district. The ruins consist of a high square, machicolated tower—the donjon—from the top of which is a magnificent view—and the remains of numerous other constructions of different epochs. These comprise the fortress proper with its system of fortifications, two chapels, the lodgings of the officers of the garrison, together with the stables for their horses, the dwelling-house and its surroundings, bakeries, cellars, outhouses, forges, etc. The rocky plateau on which these buildings stand is bounded by a crenelated wall, fortified by sallyports and towers, and the remains of iron gates are also traceable. Among the mediaeval ruins may also be noted what are incontestably the remains of a Gallo-Roman “oppidum,” among which some interesting inscriptions and sculptured fragments have been found. There are subterranean passages and rooms in the neighbourhood of the

“oppidum,” and a vast oubliette over two hundred feet deep, known as *le puits* or *l’abîme*, which encloses an abundant spring. The castle, unlike many ruins, which are more interesting from a distance than close to, is well worth visiting, and in the little village nestling at its foot is a well-preserved and interesting Romanesque church. The building is still the property of the Polignac family, who also own the restored castle of Lavoûte-Polignac further on. Young, when he visited these parts, was greatly interested in Polignac, and describes it as follows: “The castle of Polignac, from which the duke takes his title, is built on a bold and enormous (rock), it is almost of a cubical form, and towers perpendicularly above the town which surrounds it at its foot. The family of Polignac claim an origin of great antiquity; they have pretensions that go back—I forget whether to Hector or Achilles—but I have never found anyone in conversation inclined to allow them more than being in the first class of French families, which they undoubtedly are. Perhaps there is nowhere to be met with a castle more formed to give a *local* pride of family than this of Polignac; the man hardly exists that would not feel a certain vanity at having given his own name from remote antiquity to so singular and so commanding a rock; but, if with the name, it belonged to me, I would scarcely sell it for a province. The building is of such antiquity, and the situation so romantic, that all the feudal ages pass in review in one’s imagination, by a sort of magic influence; you recognise it for the residence of a lordly baron, who, in an age more distant and more respectable, though, perhaps, equally barbarous, was the patriot

defender of his country, against the invasion and tyranny of Rome."

Returning towards the Loire, the road crosses the river by the suspension bridge near Chadrac. On the right it passes the rock-pierced village of Monteil, and about half a mile further on, the village of Durianne, also on the right. After passing the mill on the Loire



Near Le Puy

the road becomes carved out of the rock, *en corniche*. It now, in a little while, crosses the Sumène just before its confluence with the Loire, leaving the village of Peyre-deyre on the right. The Loire, just before Peyre-deyre, makes a broad, tranquil lake surrounded by steep crags, and, farther on, with the road by its side, it enters the celebrated "Portes" de Peyre-deyre, and becomes encased in a narrow and very deep gorge. After about an

hour's steady walking through a country of mountain and rock, sometimes bare and sometimes covered with pines or oaks, I came to the Château of Lavoûte, belonging to the Polignac family. It stands at the end of a volcanic rock rising precipitously out of the river. The castle, which is long and rather narrow, dates chiefly from the fifteenth century, but it is for the most part a reconstruction, as we should say, though the French prefer to call it "restoration." The two flanking towers with their pointed roofs are doubtless much as they originally appeared, but they are, nevertheless, almost entirely new constructions. But if the building is not specially attractive, the site is unequalled. All round are wooded hills and bare crags: nowhere is the valley of the Loire more romantic and beautiful. At the village of Lavoûte (where there is a tolerable inn) the road crosses the river by a sixteenth-century stone bridge, after leaving on the right the road to Yssingeaux. The six miles from here to Vorey are picturesque, and the road keeps close to the river all the way. As it had a fairly good smooth surface, I covered the ground quickly.

On my way I remember passing a field quite blue with violets. Violets were not so common down here as in the highlands of Les Estables and Ste Eulalie, nor quite so good, though these were much larger than any we are accustomed to see in England. I picked myself a buttonhole of them, but picked too many, and as I could not bear to throw away the beautiful little flowers, "maids of honour" to the Spring, I stopped and dug a grave with the help of my walking-stick, and gave them a burial as nearly worthy of them

as I could contrive. The local fairies, if any happened to be on the spot, no doubt sang a requiem, but the unnecessary slaughter—as always with flowers—made me feel terribly guilty.

I got to Vorey soon after three on a bright afternoon and searched for the widow Maleysson. I did not have very far to look, for her inn turned out to be on the outskirts of the village, on the left-hand side of the road, just before it crossed the Arzon—a small brook that here joins the Loire.

The widow Maleysson was there just as my friend of the night before had indicated that she would be ; but he had wisely not attempted a description of the woman who rose up before me. Tall and with a *poitrine bombée*—very much so—she greeted me with a singularly mellifluous voice, and assured me I could have a room, of the most comfortable, for two francs. She took me upstairs to an elaborately-furnished apartment with two windows, an iron bedstead, an upholstered sofa and several engravings of goddesses at the bath or making love to swains—all calculated to make my slumbers and my dreams angelic. It was—there was no doubt about it—a most comfortable, clean room. I dismissed the widow, opened the windows, lighted a cigarette and went peacefully to bed.

When I descended to the square, main room with the little tables in it, for my Pernod before dinner (this Pernod habit was a legacy from Goudet and the hospitality of M. Bonhomme), I was encountered by the expansive “commercial” of the night before, who had recommended me to Madame Veuve Maleysson. We greeted one another as old comrades, and drawing the

widow into our charmed circle, indulged in intimacies, some of which were altogether beyond my knowledge of French.

We dined in a back room whose windows looked out on to the Arzon, which talked away to itself in the distance, carrying on, like all small rivers, its unceasing soliloquy. The Arzon always reminded me of a young married woman adding up her accounts on the way from market, "Two tums two's four and carry ought, ought tums ought's ought," and so on. We sat at a round table—M. Reynard (the *commis-voyageur*), myself, and a tall, broad-shouldered, brown-eyed man in a kind of brown Norfolk jacket of curious cut, who M. Reynard informed me was a local *fonctionnaire*. The *fonctionnaire* was very amiable, for all the world like a nice type of provincial Englishman, given to sport. When the maid, a young girl with a twinkling eye, bright cheeks, and rather straggling hair, came in and planked the soup-pot down on the stand in the middle of the table, both the *fonctionnaire* and M. Reynard threw crusts of bread at her. This was evidently a recognised custom, like the tiny embraces which she administered to the company when she brought the *écrevisses*. These dainties from the river, small fresh-water lobsters, appreciated by those clever enough to know how to eat them, were apparently forbidden by law. The widow came in from the kitchen for a moment, with the Solemn injunction to us that we were not to sneak to the inspectors who were in the neighbourhood. Not even the added charm of their being forbidden fruit, however, enabled me to get very much satisfaction out of their unbreakable "nippers." After dinner

M. Reynard insisted upon going for a little walk with me to aid his digestion, as he said. Fixing his thumbs in the corners of his waistcoat, with his bowler on the back of his head, and his little short black tail-coat hanging down very straight behind, he presented a distinctly odd appearance. The "walk" he had in view was not a very serious one, its object being a long, low, ill-lighted café beyond the station, containing two small-sized, musty billiard tables, with balls the size of cricket balls, and cues like punt poles. The excitement of this establishment lay in the fact that the proprietor's brother-in-law, who was a Protestant missionary to America and spoke "perfect English," was home on a holiday. The proprietor, who was in his shirt-sleeves and had not shaved, was in appearance not unlike my friend of Goudet, so that I liked him at once. There was a touch of pensiveness in him : he sat contemplating the night through the open door, with melancholy eyes, occasionally throwing a nod to us or a word to the two old peasants in blue trousers, with dark eyes and fierce white moustaches, who were poking the balls about on the billiard tables with their long battering-rams. M. Reynard inquired for the brother-in-law, and the *patron* rose to look for him. I sat in quite a little tremor of excitement (for I had not heard a word of English for several weeks) until the Protestant missionary appeared. The search took some minutes, but when he did appear, it was like a sudden sea breeze or the opening of a window. He had to bend down to get through the door, so tall was he, and came towards me with outstretched hand, and open, smiling face. It was a brown face with gleaming white teeth, but

extraordinarily candid and *good* and direct. His goodness shone out all over him, turning everything else, including M. Reynard and the fuggy café, to mud by contrast. His dress was as clean and handsome and healthy as the man. He looked like an English curate with his black clothes, clean linen and white dog collar, and that kind of floppy felt hat which, to experts in clerical attire, is said to indicate "Mod. High. E.P. Lights." It was only in the silk garment underneath his coat that he exhibited peculiarity, for it was embroidered in black silk with some beautiful flower that grew up his breast. It was a most intriguing garment, and like that apocryphal Colonel who, on his death-bed, called to the clergyman and uttered with his last gasp, "Tell me, quick, for God's sake, how you get into your waistcoat," I longed to make inquiries as to how on earth he put it on. Although he had been in "New Orleans" for nine years, his knowledge of English was hardly what his relatives imagined. When for instance I mentioned that I thought Vorey was very pretty, and that I would like some views of it, he remarked persuasively, "But why do you not buy some postal carts at the Tobacco?" He asked me my name, age, place of residence and destination in the sweetest way, not at all like the Abbé in the *auto* going to Le Monastier, and seemed really interested in my replies. He was so very good, in short, that he quite made me wish to be good too, and when he had to go I found the café intolerable, and roused M. Reynard for a further walk. M. Reynard, however, had not had sufficient Verveines to enable him to digest his dinner; he would not walk very far under the stars, and soon we found ourselves back again at

the Hôtel des Voyageurs. Rashly I offered him a drink, not having yet realised that instinct for commissions which lies deep in every bagman's heart. Nothing could give him greater pleasure : it was an occasion for sealing our friendship. He called the widow and ordered a bottle of Sauterne—the costliest wine that she provided—with a comical series of winks and glances. We repaired to the rather stuffy *salle-à-manger*, from which the dinner things had been cleared, and as the thought of tippling with the undiluted Reynard was displeasing, I besought the widow to join us. This in her full-throated amiable way she consented to do, and she brought with her an atmosphere of the world that was refreshing. Not a very exalted world perhaps, but one in which your best manners—such as they were—were brought out, your small-talk, your conversation, exhibited as well as you knew how. We raised our glasses with a flourish to our lips, we bowed to one another, we gave voice to amiable sentiments, we appreciated the wine thoughtfully, rolled it on the tongue and pronounced upon its quality, its smoothness, its bouquet. We sat on wooden chairs at the round table, in the middle of which stood an elaborate metal lamp that smelt. The table was covered with a shiny brown oilcloth that had worn bare in places. The lamplight threw all but the table and our three white faces into curious shadow : the top of the room was shadowy, but through the open window was a framed square of star-deepened blue, across which heavy moths occasionally lumbered. Outside, in the stone corridor leading to the kitchen, we could hear one of the young men from the café pursuing Marthe, and kissing

her with resounding kisses. "C'est son amoureux?" questioned M. Reynard. It was getting late when the widow turned to me and asked irrelevantly whether it were true that no English women were amorous, that they were cold and difficult? M. Reynard at this turned his eyes up like the typical French lover in the sentimental picture postcard, and ogled the huge widow with her *embonpoint* and parchment countenance, ogled her with a ludicrously-affected leer. The widow suddenly seemed to grow vaster and vaster, myself smaller and smaller, and making a desperately clumsy speech to the effect that though English women were not lacking in tender feelings, yet the charm of French women was greatly appreciated by my countrymen, I bowed hastily, wished her and M. Reynard a good night, and fled upstairs.

The following day I devoted to an exploration of Vorey; not a very harassing task. The little town contains only about two thousand inhabitants. It boasts a little *place*, where the *mairie* faces the principal café, a shady street well planted with trees, a bright, brand-new telegraph office and post office, a cemetery, and a modern Romanesque church. Here every 16th of June is celebrated the "Messe de la Lépreuse," to which flock the inhabitants of the neighbouring hamlets of Vertaure and Eyravazet. This is an interesting tribute to the immense "catholicity" of the Catholic faith, for a more—to some minds—shocking example of pagan superstition than the incident which occasioned it, it would be hard to imagine. The story goes that in a remote, undated age a poor leper woman came a-begging for food to



THE LOIRE NEAR VOREY.

the tiny hamlet of Eyravazet, and was refused even so much as a crust of bread and a bowl of milk. At Vertaure she did no better, and, completely exhausted, she crept into an old disused shed and there died of hunger. The peasants, when her body was discovered, dug a deep pit and threw the corpse into it together with the débris of the hut, which they destroyed, and covered the whole with earth. The place, still remembered and pointed out, is called Las Cabannas. Afterwards, though the corn and vines of the two cruel hamlets were blighted and destroyed with hailstorms, the part near Las Cabannas was miraculously spared, and remained green and fruitful. The peasants of the two smitten places took their misfortunes to be a sign from Heaven, and vowed a mass *in perpetuo* for the soul of la Lépreuse. Her body was dug up and buried again at Vorey in consecrated earth, and the woman herself was locally canonised as Ste Juliette.

The chief places of interest in the immediate neighbourhood of Vorey are the ruins of the castles of Arzon, Saint-Pierre-Duchamp, and Roche-en-Régnier — the latter a magnificent ruin above the bank of the Loire near Chamalières, but invisible from the river. And, nearer at hand, there is the Maison des Moines, an important twelfth-century remnant of a priory of the order of Grandmont, in the valley of Viaye.

The situation of Vorey is certainly its strongest point. It lies in a broad valley surrounded by wooded hills, frequently covered with dark pines and golden with broom in early summer. The river, which is joined here by the Arzon, a feeble enough stream at the *étiage*, makes a series of violent twists, almost

doubling back on its tracks. Indeed, some miles below this spot, in prehistoric ages, it accomplished the extraordinary feat of carving itself a passage through the huge mass of laminated lava that barred its way, and must at one time have made of the basin of Vorey a huge lake. The great rocks of Miaune and Gerbison, the latter rising to a height of 1800 feet above the river, stand now as witnesses of the little stream's amazing determination. I say "little" perhaps too carelessly. It is little in summer, but in the season of floods it becomes a roaring, unrecognisable monster, for whom the perforation of a mountain would not be so difficult.

From Vorey to Retournac, a distance of eight or nine miles, the Loire passes through a series of deep gorges. Although classed as *flottable* from Vorey, it is difficult to see how even the tiniest craft, having as small a draft as, say, an Accordian folding canoe, could get down it without occasionally grounding. Just below the town there are rapids where the river streams down a gentle slope through the loose stones which its waters barely cover. After this rapid, the first below Vorey, the river turns back sharply and a good reach of water follows. The hills here rise precipitously from the Loire, and are covered with trees, which grow wherever they can find a foothold. The slopes were all lit up when I saw them with the flower of the broom. They are less terrible hills these, less majestic than those at Le Puy, but high and steep enough to lend the river still the appearance of a torrent.

Following the road, which is some distance above the river—the old lower road, about a kilometre out of

Vorey, having been washed away in one of the spates—I came, after two miles, to a small hamlet lying between the road and the river, called Le Chambon. Here the road and the railway—which has been keeping it company—dive through tunnels in the living rock. The road turns abruptly and crosses a very handsome bridge, under which are three large rocks in the channel, and proceeds thence through a lovely country between high wooded hills covered with broom, past a ferry and an old mill, to the interesting village of Chamalières, at the foot of Mt. Gerbison, and facing Mt. Miaune, some five miles from Vorey.

Chamalières contains one of the most interesting churches in Haute Loire. It has recently been restored, and is classed as a “monument historique.” Its most noticeable feature is an arcaded clerestory, in which are, on each side, three windows, and between each of them two blind arches. The tower has been reconstructed, and is now in two stories, with four windows on each side on the first story and two on the second. The fabric, which dates from the twelfth century, is a remnant of an ancient priory, and contains the remains of frescoes, a Romanesque *bénitier*, and tombs and altars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

A certain amount of the country round Chamalières is given over to the cultivation of vines, and stone is also quarried in the surrounding hills. The river, after a long stickle above the village, runs green and deep in front of it, and there are a number of punts in use just here. The high mountains on both sides become sometimes craggy at the top, and the ruins of

a castle on a hill dominated by Mt. Miaune, whose interest is purely spectacular, lend the scene a touch of the grandiose. Just below Chamalières, the stream opens out again, making a wide and shallow reach, and as I passed in the evening light, I saw a boy paddling quietly in the middle of it, his dark form outlined against the yellow twilit sky. The Loire, as many of its singers have pointed out, "sleeps" whenever it gets the chance. Like human beings whose tempers, when roused, are similarly ungovernable, nothing could be more angelic than its appearance in peaceful moments.

Beyond Chamalières the river enters the valley of Retournac. Just before this little town, the next station on the line and a large parish containing nearly four thousand souls, is a long deep reach formed artificially by a *barrage*; as smooth and placid and boatable as the upper Cherwell at Oxford. At Retournac I noticed the slopes of the hills were being thinned of their trees and the trunks lopped and sent sliding down the hillside in a kind of shoot or groove, just as I have seen them sent down in the Black Forest. The church, though somewhat overshadowed by that of Chamalières, is an interesting Romanesque building, restored in the fifteenth century and offering points of interest to the architectural expert.

On one of the heights of the right bank of the Loire, about a mile and a quarter to the south-east, are the picturesque ruins of the castle of Mercuret; and about two miles to the north-east, situated on a magnificent peak nearly three thousand feet high, is the interesting Chapelle de la Madeleine. From Retournac, the

mountain views are wonderful, and afar in all directions the great humps of the Cevennes lift themselves to the sky. The railway here keeps closely to the river, and I continued my journey through the lovely summer evening in the carriage of a P.L.M. train, keeping the Loire in sight all the way, as it ran now like a line of silver under the dark shadow of the hills. The next town after Retournac is Beauzac, with between two and three thousand people, remarkable for its graceful one-arched suspension bridge. It boasts also an old castle, at one time occupied by the Sisters of St. Joseph, of which two gates and the ruins of the fortified enclosure remain ; and a Romanesque church built over a crypt. One of the many ruins that lend picturesqueness to those craggy precipices that are characteristic of the upper Loire is to be noticed here—the remains of the priory of Confolens, founded in A.D. 995. Below Beauzac the river for some way becomes extremely narrow, then opens out at a spot where there is a bathing pool, then sinks once more through a stickle, and enters the defile of Pont de Lignon. Pont de Lignon, the next station, is noticeable for its great stoneworks ; here the Loire is joined by the Lignon du Sud, the most important river in the department, after the Loire and the Allier. It has its rise in the commune of Chaudeyrolles, north of Mt. Mézenc. After Pont de Lignon, the narrow valley soon opens out into the wide, fertile plain of Bas-en-Basset, formed by the alluvium washed down by the Loire. At the top of it is the embouchure of the Ance du Nord. The station is in the middle of the plain, between the two towns of Bas and Monistrol-sur-Loire, of which the larger is

Monistrol, with just over five thousand inhabitants. Bas has three thousand. Monistrol is a pretty town,



At Pont de Lignon

built on what is nearly an island, between two torrents which unite just below it and, taking the name of the Folletier, hurl themselves into the Loire. The town

used at one time to belong to the bishops of Le Puy, and was in olden days their favourite place of residence. Its castle, which is perched on a hill dominating the place, was enlarged and restored by the two bishops Jehan de Bourbon and Armand de Béthune in the second half of the fifteenth century. It is flanked with towers at each angle, and has been partially destroyed by fire. From the castle is a fine view across the broad valley of the Loire to Bas, with the strange outlines of the château de Rochebaron in the distance. Monistrol contains numerous Gothic houses, the most interesting perhaps being the ancient convent with its carved doorway, and spiral staircase capped with a pointed roof. The church has a Romanesque cupola, and inside, slender Romanesque columns. There is a commendable hotel at Monistrol, the Hôtel du Nord, presided over by the widow Masson, and the place is as good a centre for exploring the Velay as Le Puy. Indeed, if a prejudice in favour of a more gracious country-side may peep out, I preferred it to the bleakness of the higher slopes. From Monistrol to Bas is about four miles, mostly across the wide plain. At Bas the Loire forms its first considerable island, the wooded Île de la Garenne, which is about a mile in length. The town itself is agreeable, but contains little noticeably of interest, its great "lion" being the castle of Rochebaron, situated on a precipitous rock about a mile and a half to the north-west. This castle was built in the reign of Charles VII, and dismantled by that arch-dismantler Richelieu. It is a triangular-shaped donjon, whose ruined towers and walls present a curious, even surprising, outline, especially at night. At Bas

there are some punts on the river, and it is tolerably navigable down to a *barrage*, just below the town, after which there is almost a waterfall, and the Loire narrows once more into the gorge of Aurec. Canoeing from Bas in a very light craft would be an adventurous feat, only possible with constant portages of the boat, which of necessity would have to be the



• Castle of Rochebaron, near Bas

lightest made. I noticed a canoe tied up just above the rapids before Aurec, and at Aurec there were again a number of punts, though the rapids here are dangerous, with rocks sticking up in the middle of the stream.

Aurec is a pleasant town, with nearly three thousand inhabitants, nestling among vine-clad hills, and containing the ruined tower of a thirteenth-century castle, and a fine modern house, the Tour-des-Sauvages. The

canoeing between Aurec and Le Pertuiset during the summer months is quite possible, and the scenery—steep rocks, and wooded hills bright with broom, and green pastures—is particularly fine. Between these two points the river is joined by the Sumène, just before it crosses the border into the department of the Loire, and flows round the base of the mountain of St. Paul-en-Cornillon. On the slopes of this hill is a remarkably-situated village of the same name, containing an interesting twelfth-century church, an ancient convent chapel, and, on the rocks which crown the hill above the village, the remains of the castle of Cornillon. This splendid fortress, magnificent even in its decay, on a site at once the “most severe and the most gracious” in Le Forez, was formerly one of the strongest fortified places in the district. Its site is remarkably picturesque, even for such a picturesque country-side. The parish church of the village is inside the first line of fortifications. The Loire, while flowing round the base of St. Paul-en-Cornillon, enters the department of the Loire, and reaches its first village in that department, the small hamlet of Le Pertuiset.

This village is frequented by a few visitors from St. Étienne, and is a charming place in which to spend a summer holiday, with excellent bathing and fishing. Just above here I saw for the first time since Brives—where the boat could not have been used for more than a hundred yards—a boat with oars, of the ordinary fiver type. Below Le Pertuiset, the railway leaves the Loire, after having been its inseparable companion from Le Puy along a series of mountainous gorges of unsurpassed loveliness, leaves it for the Lancashire-like

gloom of St. Étienne. On emerging from the department of Haute Loire the river has accomplished just over a hundred miles of its course, though so constant have been its windings that the distance from its source by the direct route is under forty miles.

CHAPTER V

IN THE FOREZ

FOR travellers who have to depend on the railway there is no avoiding St. Étienne. In theory, it is possible to get out at St. Just and wait, but none of the natives are bold enough to do this. St. Étienne is a foul, all-attracting monster which sucks you in for an hour or two, only to vomit you forth in some new direction. All the way up the line from Firminy, through Le Chambon-Feugerolles and La Ricamarie to St. Étienne, one is in a coal country, black and terrifying. It has, of course, its interesting and attractive side—life is a fierce thing there, labour is intelligent and discontented, passions are hot—but it is not an interest or attraction that a traveller down the valley of the Loire is likely to be in a mood to enjoy. It is a great modern town of about 150,000 inhabitants, in the midst of what, before its growth, was mountain country as lovely as the Yorkshire dales. Its tramways are a snare. They take you willingly enough away from the station, but bring you most reluctantly back. If you ask the conductor of a tram in the middle of the town if his machine goes “to the station,” he will be sure to reply “Yes.” You get in and are landed at another station about two miles from the one at which your train is waiting. I have no pleasant memories of St.

Étienne ; in spite of its size it has no magnificence. Its town hall is pretentious, but unimposing : its central square, monuments, and public buildings are mean and unworthy. Few towns in France of a quarter its size are so lacking in any expression of civic pride. However, to St. Étienne you must go first, if you want to get away from it.

Almost immediately on its entrance into the department of the Loire, the river flows into the deep and intricate gorges of St. Victor, one of the most picturesque parts of its course, emerging from them only at St. Rambert. St. Rambert is an interesting old town with a priory church partly dating from the tenth century, remarkable for two square towers, one of which—used as a porch—has a roughly carved frieze of the eleventh century. The town also boasts some remains of its fifteenth-century ramparts, and numerous old houses.

Opposite St. Rambert, on the right bank of the river, is the slightly smaller town of St. Just-sur-Loire, which has the remains of a fifteenth-century bridge, the interesting Château de la Barallière, and on a rock, dominating the right bank of the river, the picturesque ruins of the feudal fortress of Grangent. At this point the Loire flows into the wide *plaine du Forez*, an unhealthy, humid, misty expanse—in ancient times a great lake, and still containing numerous shallow ponds. The whole district in the summer is far from healthy, and after the brisk, bright air of the Cevennes it makes the unhappy traveller feel that he has been enveloped in a warm and damp blanket. The plain stretches, on the west, to the base of the mountains of

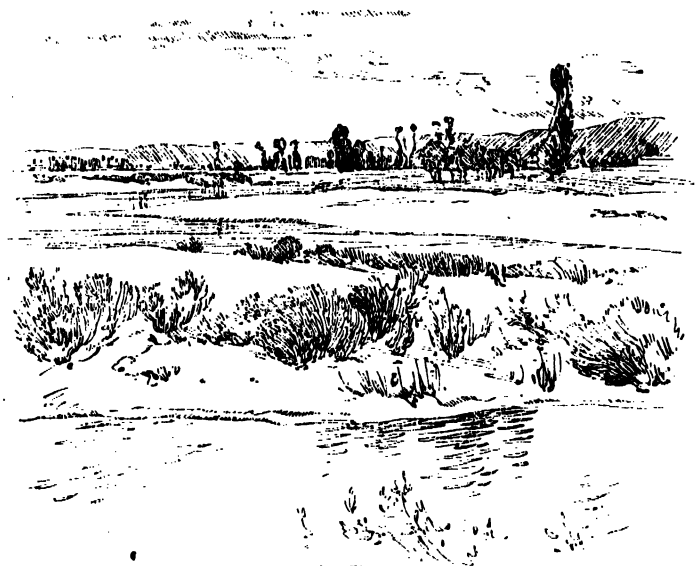
Le Forez, and on the east to the foot of the mountains of the Lyonnais. It is hard to realise here, so muggy and unlike the Rhone valley is the climate, that the Rhone is barely thirty miles away, the great city of Lyons less than fifty. Officially, the river became navigable at the hamlet of La Noirie in the gorges of St. Victor, and no doubt in certain seasons of the year two skilled canoers could have a very good time slipping down stream in a light boat. It is not a thing that I have heard of anyone doing, which is not unnatural considering the climate and the comparative lack of interest in the river's course between, say, St. Rambert and Balbigny.

After entering the plain, the river passes Andrézieux, a fairly large village with nothing in particular to recommend it and some connection with the coal trade. Then the tall shell of the feudal castle of Montrond on the left bank is passed, and we come to Feurs—the Forum Segusiavorum of the Romans—from which the Forez derives its name.

The widow of Vorey had strongly recommended Feurs; guide-books described it as an "antique ville"; it announced itself with a certain reasonable assurance on the map; it was in the midst of a country that I had never heard of anyone visiting; and it was not a place I had read about in a fat book with illustrations! As the train ran on through the dull, dead, blue-green landscape that faded in the distance to a misty blur—so different from the freshness of the hill country—I grew quite pleasantly excited. I built all sorts of hopes on Feurs; and after a while I arrived.

The station faced down the usual boulevard—broad, new, and lined with trees planted by the contractor.

It continued in a straight line: I with it. Soon we should come to the "antique ville." After half a mile something, indeed, happened, for this straight road was crossed at right angles by another road—the Allée de Bigny—equally straight and broad, but certainly more pleasing. You could see in both directions how, as soon as it left the town, it ran into a positive green



At Feurs

tunnel of trees. Such a deeply shaded *route nationale* I cannot recall having noticed anywhere else in France; it was delicious, but—in either direction—the trees were a long half-mile away.

It was Sunday. I had almost forgotten it till I examined the two cafés that faced one another in the broad, deserted *place*, where the roads crossed. They were filled with black-coated men lugubriously drinking Belgian bottled beer. Such Sabbath stolidity I have

seldom seen even in the dullest English provincial town. The muggy atmosphere seemed, through its effect of depression, to have left its mark on the type in these parts. Perhaps I ought to say that it left its mark on the *men*, for against Feurs I see I have mentioned in my notebook "buxom flappers." Indeed, the fat girls and the fat pigeons were the only features of interest in this singularly dull town. The girls regarded the stranger with a kind of haughty curiosity (an improvement on mere indifference), making mental notes of his funny face and his odd clothes, and sometimes giggling, when two of them met and were able to exchange ideas. They seemed all to be about sixteen years of age. Perhaps they are an institution, the fat girls of Feurs. The theory gains some support from the fact that in a small, dark *Buvette* in a back street—the only unrespectable spot in the dismal little town—I heard a gramophone grinding out the verses of a ballad, which celebrated their charms at endless length. Probably the song originated at the Caveau Stéphanois, at St. Étienne; it is bad enough for anything, and has clearly no folk-song flavour. I give a verse as nearly as I can remember it :

“ Longs cils, fines tresses,
 Bouche de corail,
 Vrai nid à caresses
 Au bijou d'émail,
 Buste qui révèle
 Deux seins vigoureux—
 Voilà de la belle
 Le croquis heureux.

Andalouse, Parisienne,
 Florentine à l'œil noir ou bleu,
 Je vous préfère encor, morbleu !
 La gentille Forézienne.”

Every man to his taste, of course ; personally, on that lamentable Sunday afternoon, I felt I would have preferred an Andalouse—"au sein bruni"—to lend a little liveliness to the proceedings ; or even a Florentine "à l'œil noir !" After my encounter with the *gentilles Foréziennes* I remembered that it was the Loire that had brought one to this strange spot, and hurried down the straight, white road to look for it. It swirled its yellow waters under the narrow suspension bridge that bears the *route nationale* on its six-mile course to Boën, looking forlorn and desolate. Boën (in parenthesis) is an old town of the Forez, a little smaller than Feurs, well situated above the left bank of the Lignon forézien. (This stream joins the Loire below Feurs, and is famous for its trout fishing.) Boën boasts a fifteenth-century church of some interest, though restored in 1866, and a château built in 1786, but incorporating an hexagonal tower of earlier date. Some four miles to the east of the town lies the celebrated Château de la Bâtie, in the village of St. Étienne-le-Molard, the finest renaissance building in the Forez. It was here, at the end of the sixteenth century, that Honoré D'Urfé wrote his once celebrated novel "Astrée." He was (incidentally) the ancestor of that improper rascal—author of "Pills to Purge Melancholy"—our own Tom Durfey. The château came into the possession of the D'Urfé family in 1831. The fine Court of Honour, which has a lovely double arcade on one side, is crossed by an arm of the Lignon, and from it an inclined road used to enable carriages to be driven up to the first story of the house. Unfortunately, the building was denuded at the end of the nineteenth century of its most beautiful

carved stonework ; but it remains a place of great beauty and charm, with a stimulating air of decay.

To return to Feurs and the Loire. The river at Feurs cannot be called attractive. It is navigable for punts and canoes, is fairly wide, and runs over shifting sands, through a wide plain and between low, sandy, grass banks. Till below Balbigny and the little village of St. Georges-de-Baroille, a place of pilgrimage to Our Lady's Shrine, it has little interest, and traverses a monotonous, unhealthy district.

It was with a sadly abashed heart that I retraced my steps up the street past the vulgar stucco "Palace" of some local magnate, back to the station. Feurs had played me false ; it was a town of sleep, suffocated by its own humidity. As though to show me the vanity of first impressions, however, a very ugly chapel came into view, which had been erected by Louis XVIII in 1824 as an act of expiation for the immense number of victims who fell by the scaffold at Feurs during the Revolution. In the whole district of the Forez, indeed, the Revolution raged with extraordinary ferocity ; churches and manors were pillaged, and priests and nobles were murdered by hundreds.

I thought I could hear a train snorting in the distance and continued more hurriedly along the boulevard, scattering a crowd of pigeons that had collected round me as I stood, contemplative, in the middle of the place. It *was* a train ; and waving my handkerchief to the kindest of the fat girls, I made for it, and quickly brought to an end my first (and I trust my last) visit to Feurs. The railway, like the main roads in this part, goes as straight as if it had been ruled, as far as Balbigny,

after which it enters a land of grassy hills, lasting as far as the plain of Roanne.

From Balbigny to Roanne the Loire winds at the bottom of long and deep defiles, through ancient rocks (of Orthophyry and Porphyry) which close it in for nearly twenty miles. This is the river's last struggle with the rocks, and from Roanne to the sea it encounters nothing but plains and gentle sloping hills instead of mountains and cañons. While the Loire runs through these gorges it has no villages actually on its banks, and such places as occur near it are situated on the plateau at the back, behind one or other bank and out of sight of the river, unless they happen to look down at it from a great height. One of the most curious reaches is known as the Saut de Pinay, about four miles from the entrance of the gorges. At this point there used to be a boiling current. A great engineering work was undertaken here two centuries ago, to form a reservoir. The two hills of crystalline rock that here narrow the bed of the Loire make the construction of a bridge easy ; a fact which the Romans appreciated, and the piles of their bridge could still be seen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. To the natural *barrage* formed by the rock has been added an enormous *digue de retenue*, constructed by the engineer Mathieu in 1711 under the instructions of Louis XIV. This was the first effort made towards the regularisation of the *débit* of the Loire, and was a complete success. The *barrage*, often repaired since, reaches the height of about fifty feet above the level of the water at its summer height, and during the big *crues* can reserve as much as 100,000 or 180,000 cubic metres of water.

It seems a pity that similar undertakings—or some still more ambitious scheme that would render the great



The Saut de Pinay

river navigable from this point—are not carried out all down its course.

Some five miles before emerging from its last

gorges, the Loire passes in a narrow rapid beneath a gigantic crag, at the spot known as the Saut du Perron, just after flowing by the interesting little village of St. Maurice, dominated by the ruins of a castle built in the twelfth century, reconstructed in the fifteenth, and dismantled in the sixteenth. The piles of an ancient Roman bridge are to be seen in the river near St. Maurice—four masses of masonry which originally bore the bridge between two projecting crags of rock. After the Saut du Perron the river forms a small island; then, flowing beneath the bridge of Villerest, washes the vine-clad slopes of Vernay and widens out to flow past the town and through the plain of Roanne.

Undaunted by my adventure at Feurs, I decided that Roanne, at last, would be my dream-city—untrodden of tourists, virgin, unknown. No English people surely had visited it or could possibly be found there! I arrived by train on a heavy, airless afternoon, and was too hot and tired to search the town for “the perfect hotel,” and took almost the first that came. It happened to be one which I had overheard two travellers in my compartment commending on the score of cleanliness and good cooking, and I remember it had a big *porte-cochère*, and the bureau was the *comptoir* in the big indoor café by its side. For it was from the café, entering by the side door, that I eventually disinterred the *patron*. He was a large man with a black, walrus moustache, seamed face, and perplexed eyes, and I asked him in my purest Parisian if he had a room of the kind I wanted.

“Oh, yes, sir,” he replied, to my great consternation, “certainly, sir, this way, sir!” It had a wide verandah,

the room, and was extremely comfortable. From it, I looked at the line of red sky over the undistinguished roofs, pressed down by a grey weight of cloud ; watched



Near Roanne, St. Maurice

the motionless leaves of the chestnut trées in half a hundred back gardens all standing waiting for the rain ; observed a tall chimney lift its brick head into the unwilling sky ; and finally read on the side of a

house, in big white letters, the mystic words "Roanneries, Cotonneries." Then I went out to explore the town.

It was my own fault, after all, that I was disappointed; the guide-book (when it is a Baedeker) cannot lie, and I had had ample opportunities of discovering the important fact that the place is given over to the cotton trade. It is an increasing place situated at the head of the lateral canal which joins the Loire with the Loing (viâ Briare), and so with the Seine. The Loire itself, too, below the great *barrage*, a kilometre downstream from the bridge, becomes navigable for barges, though few, if any, at the present day are to be seen upon it. So, all things considered, at Roanne more than anywhere one might have expected to cross the trail of the English bagman, to find him diffusing the speech of Manchester in all its purity.

In Roanne itself, with the best intentions in the world, I could not discover any redeeming features. It apparently woke up one morning to find itself swollen; awoke too late in the day properly to readjust its narrow streets of the little country town to the new conditions. The cross-roads (*carrefour*) in the middle of it are so narrow that, until the alterations at present (1911) in progress are completed, traffic is positively dangerous, especially as it includes electric tramcars. The road from the station, passing through the public gardens, leads straight through the town, past the new Hôtel de Ville, and across a bridge to the suburb of Le Côteau. If you turn to the left at the *carrefour*, past a dull Swiss "indoor" café painted black and gold, you find yourself in a narrow, busy street, for all the world like a high street in an English country town, say,

Horsham. After passing an ugly stucco church, one comes eventually to an old, empty square, where is, in one corner, the restored tower, now used as a dwelling-house, of the old castle. It contains also some quaint mediaeval cottages, this little Place du Château, and makes a curious relic of that old "Roane" that was known (as I subsequently discovered) both to Evelyn and Young. Evelyn writes in 1644: "26 Sept. We arriv'd at Roan, where we quitted our guide and tooke post for Lions. Roan seem'd to me one of the pleasantest and most agreeable places imaginable for a retyred person: besides the situation on the Loire, there are excellent provisions, cheap and abundant." A word here as to the excellence, abundance, and cheapness of the food at my hotel may perhaps be taken as corroboration, after over two hundred and sixty years, of the truth of the last sentence. Young, writing nearly a century and a half after Evelyn, observes: "The buildings increase both in number and goodness on approaching the Seine (Loire) which we crossed at Roane; it is here a good river, and is navigable many miles higher, and consequently at a vast distance from the sea. There are many flat-bottomed barges on it, of a considerable size." The decay of navigation on the Loire in modern times is much deplored by French topographers, greatest among whom in our own day, Ardouin-Dumazet, has an eloquent passage on the subject in one of his books:

"L'état de ce beau fleuve de Loire est véritablement une honte," he writes, with fine eloquence. "Un tel cours d'eau, coupant en écharpe un pays comme la France, aurait dû être maintenu navigable à tout prix.

Les raisons tirées du peu de fixité du courant et des bancs obstruant le lit sont certainement très graves, mais on ne peut s'empêcher de constater que, jusqu'à nos jours, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à la construction des voies ferrées, la Loire fut un grand chemin. Toutes les vieilles vues panoramiques des villes de la Loire, Orléans, Blois, Tours, nous montrent le fleuve couvert de bateaux. On serait en droit de se méfier, en se rappelant les formules du paysage selon Poussin et Claude Lorrain avec les vides remplis par des navires et des 'fabriques,' si nous n'avions à ce sujet les constatations d'un témoin impartial, Arthur Young. Le voyageur anglais ne manque pas de signaler les bancs de sable, le peu de fixité du lit, le triste aspect de la Loire en été ; mais il la représente comme animée par la navigation." In 1447 René of Anjou, the good king, when he thought it better to retire from Angers to Tarascon, made the journey by boat, "sailing in his galley," as far as Roanne, proceeding thence to Lyons, where he dropped down the Rhone to his castle. The journey took less than a month.

To return to the old square, with its old houses and the preserved tower of the castle, it remains embedded in the new Roanne that has grown round it: a charming mediæval corner in a situation which provides a contrast almost painful. For Roanne as a whole I confess an "imperfect sympathy." The principal shops were in the street I have mentioned running through the midst of the town. Such book-shops!—containing all the novels that one had not the slightest desire to read, with nothing emanating from the *Mercure de France* and a whole window full of Marcel Prévost!

Then, there were picture postcards of little girls in white, holding up their rosaries affectedly (in front of the camera) and turning up their eyes ; little boys in clean collars with satin bows on their right arms, putting a hand on their hearts and ogling a crucifix ; sentimental young men with black upturned moustaches, and pink cheeks, who showed the whites of their eyes and stretched out inviting arms to simpering young women ! One might search the English counties in vain for a place æsthetically more dead.

I had been a day and a night in Roanne before I examined the river which had brought me there. The Loire at Roanne (you reach it by going down the road from the station to the *carrefour* and proceeding straight down the long road towards Le Côtéau) is swift and broad, split up every now and then by green islands and bordered with the usual line of laundry barges whence comes in the day-time the unceasing noise of clothes being splashed and spanked on the washing-boards. Walking downwards from the bridge, you come soon to a huge *barrage* across the river, followed by the mouth of the *canal latéral à la Loire*, which connects Roanne with Digoin. At the head of the canal is a curious dock for barges, an animated and picturesque sight, with the pleasant craft of barge-building in operation along one side. From Roanne the canal goes very straight, through the midst of its unbroken avenue of poplars, to Digoin. I have a great fondness for canals, and decided mentally, that if on a future occasion I were to repeat my pilgrimage with an Accordion canoe among my baggage, I would choose the canal in preference to the river.

The joys of the canal would not have been enough by themselves to keep me in Roanne. Nothing, I am sure of it, save the vagaries of the post office, could have done that. A hitch had occurred in my arrangements, my erratic movements had thrown things out of gear, and the letter that should have been waiting for me when I came, delayed two days. On its arrival I had to wait a further twenty-four hours before they would cash the order it contained : had to wait for a letter of advice ! However, at last I was released and had to consider my next stop. The *commis-voyageurs* in the hotel, who treated me with an almost overpowering consideration, reviling meanwhile the coldness of Lyons and other unamiable parts, urged upon me that I must go to Digoin ; such a thriving, flourishing town. I suggested that for my purposes towns a little worn, mildewed with association, towns of a slightly pensive cast of countenance, were preferable. I suggested Paray-le-Monial, between Roanne and Digoin : an ancient " holy " city, celebrated as a place of pilgrimage. But they would hear no good of Paray : besides, of what use was it to me since it was not, actually, on the Loire ? This last argument I found unanswerable ; and set off by train in the evening, through a country of woods and pastures between two lines of low, blue hills, to the prosperous town of Digoin.

CHAPTER VI

DIGOIN

THE train went slowly through the humid and darkening plain; through the stations of Pouilly-sur-Charlieu (with the grand twelfth-century ruins of the abbey of la Bénissons-Dieu about three and a half miles to the west); through Iguerande, where the station-master has a voice of thunder—no one shall visit Iguerande without realising what he has done—and Marcigny, which lies three miles from its station and has 2533 inhabitants. Apparently this is all that can be said for Marcigny; not even Joanne, who, in his dictionary, displays superterrestrial omniscience, can find anything but official details as to the post and telegraph service, the number of policemen, and so on, to record. I left the dim station in the gloaming, nevertheless, with a sinking of the heart. Marcigny on the Loire! It lurks concealed in a green corner so exquisitely provincial that you feel you are in the very centre of the whole world, with no sea within a six months' journey, nothing but long, unending white roads, straight, unending rows of trees. In the middle of it all is just plain Marcigny, with 2533 inhabitants. Sometimes I wake up in the night with a great longing for that place. I am convinced that if I had but answered the de-

spondent, almost wistful, invitation of the individual who walked half-heartedly up and down the train swinging his lantern and exclaiming, "Marcigny Marcigny !" in a tone of settled melancholy—so different from the boisterous, deceitful fellow of Iguerande—something rare and wonderful would have happened I should have met something, someone. I should perhaps have been there still. But no ! I had not yet learned the great lesson for travellers : " Natives never know their own country, so never take their advice about it." Following blindly the counsel given me by the *élite* of Roanne, I persevered.

The landscape was flat and undistinguished, with the river winding through, and churches with little pointed spires on every rising spot of ground. So to Paray-le-Monial. At Paray it rained. Paray, I have discovered since, is a place of considerable interest. It rose into prominence as a *lieu de pèlerinage* in the reign of Louis XIV, owing to the revelations vouchsafed to a religious of the Order of the Visitation, one Marguerite Marie Alacoque. Paray is the centre in France of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and of all France it is the town most frequented by pilgrims, after Lourdes. The basilica, which dates from the twelfth century, is a good example of the Burgundian type of Romanesque architecture. The town contains between four and five thousand inhabitants, and, naturally enough, a number of religious houses and institutions. I was credibly informed that its chief inn was called "The Three Pigeons."

I give these details on the best authority ; my own

memories of Paray are concerned with the rain, a dark vigil on one of the draughty, twilit platforms of the station, and a change of trains. I had decided on Digoin, and to Digoin I would go—"Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat."

The second train was nearly empty ; luckily Digoin was the next station. At Digoin I was the only traveller to alight. I left my luggage at the *consigne*, and at half-past nine fared out into the unrelenting rain. I found myself looking down the broad inevitable road ; it was sandy, and the sand had clotted a little in the rain, and there were chestnut trees—a combination subtly suggestive of *summer*, which I usually love. There were no omnibuses inscribed with the names of inviting hostelries competing for the honour of my entertainment, so I fared on foot. On the left, just outside the station, there was indeed a brilliantly lighted hotel, but, on examination, it proved to be much smaller than it had looked, and rather squalid. I went on up the street, between two lines of low, irregular little houses, most of them silent and dark and musical with snores and groans. Occasionally bleared lamplight suggested a *café*, and slow-moving shadows on the blind the presence of some dismal drinkers. The rain was falling with a steady persistence ; I began to feel wet, and it got gradually on my nerves. Still there was no sign of an hotel, no sign of a town, no *place*, no central point, nothing but this interminable road of dark houses. I walked on and on, longing to shout "Wake up ! wake up !" at the top of my voice ; and at last I came to cross-roads. This surely must be the "prosperous town

of Digoin " now. I turned to the right and found myself in a square, in the midst of which stood a tall, silent church surrounded by silent stone houses: a gas lamp flickered in one corner. Dark clouds hurried across the sky, rain fell in gusts, and I turned wildly down the first side street that presented itself, only to emerge, after five minutes' quick walking, back in the long, straight station road. I recalled that pretentious-looking inn that I had first seen, and avoided; confessed myself beaten and returned to it. It was now ten o'clock, and the few remaining revellers were on the point of retiring to bed. Inside the big café were the usual mildewed "billards," two evil-looking peasants drinking beer with a more than British stolidity, a slatternly woman who looked as though she had been engaged as a charwoman by the day, and had been forced to work overtime (strands of her dirty yellow hair escaped and fell down; the corners of her mouth drooped with discontent), and a small Swiss waiter of about fourteen, with blond hair and cherubic eyes. I inquired of the waiter for a room; he referred me to the discontented charwoman, who handed out a key. The little waiter lighted a candle and preceded me, leading the way into a back garden.. Here the wind and rain put the candle out, and he had to hurry back for a box of matches. We then climbed along the back of the house till we came to a step which nearly "threw" me, crossed a gravel drive, reached an outhouse, ascended a wooden "outside" staircase, like the one at Goudet, and soon found ourselves in a long corridor with bedrooms opening out of it on either side. The waiter deposited me with

a quaint little bow in Number Seven, and departed to fetch my luggage. The room was small and square, the window bolted and shuttered, the bed old and of mahogany, with an end curling like a disdainful lip. It was surmounted by a red, mountainous quilt ; the



Digoin

bottom sheet was not there, or rather it was one with the mattress—a union that filled me with distrust. Its texture was coarse in the extreme, and it was of an evil yellowish colour. I sat down on a creaky, not too safe chair, and read the embellished lettering of

the little placard over the chimney-piece : “ Va, Jeune Fille à Jésus ! Va ! Va ! Va ! ” till I lost all patience with Christian ideals, and waited in a dejection more utter, I am sure, than anything experienced by those new to Pentonville or Holloway. When my luggage arrived, pyjamaed, I considered the necessity of entering the bed. The candle was spluttering, it would be out in a moment ; there was no time to be lost. I threw the bulging red quilt in one corner, held up the flickering candle in one hand, and with the other drew the coverlet desperately back. . . . A moment of suspense terminated by a piercing scream. . . . I tugged hard at the bell, and discovered it was not there. There was no bell. I advanced to the outer door, so like the door of a loft, stood in the rain at the top of the wooden stairs, and resolutely called. There was no reply. There are moments of bitterness, of despair, in everyone’s life which may not be expressed in words, which lie too deep for tears, and that damp and melancholy vigil I shall be a long time forgetting.

But my voice, hoarse with yearning, at length penetrated through the night to the little Swiss boy, and he came running. I asked for the *patronne*. “ Bien, M’sieu.” Another pause. Eventually, snail-like with annoyance, the slatternly creature I had mistaken for a charwoman came shambling through the rain. With a bony hand she shaded a guttering piece of candle, stuck in a brass candlestick, and its feeble light, falling on her face, gave her a momentary witch-like look as she came through the yard towards me. She tried to parley from the bottom of the stairs, but no—up she must come. “ But, M’sieu, it is already

late." Nonsense, it was only half-past ten, and, late or not, she must look. The unexpected force of a mild man startled was too much for her, and she came meekly. My *coup de théâtre*, as I threw back the sheet, was not doomed to failure: "it" had not moved. "Ah!" said the *patronne*, pouncing suddenly with index finger and thumb, and holding these in front of the candle. "Ah!" she said, with feebly simulated surprise, "c'est une petite bête." I preserved a face of stone, waiting strategically for her explanation. Incidentally, so great was my emotion that all my French had deserted me. She went on, suddenly voluble. It suffices, she explained, for *some* people to sleep but one night in a bed to produce such a result. I gasped. "But there is another room," she said, "a bigger room. Would M'sieu come this way?" She opened the door, held the candle high up to light her way down the long passage, and the curious torchlight procession set off. The little waiter, carrying my shoes in his hand and my clothes over his arm, brought up the rear. This night, I became convinced, I should be murdered if I slept a wink. Madame threw open the door of a cavernous room on the right, and said I could have that. There were two windows shuttered and bolted, a vast ominous clothes-press, and by the flickering candle-light I discovered no less than three beds surmounted by three monstrous quilts. . . . The appearance the room presented to a nervous mind was, in the last degree, terrifying. Beneath those quilts one could imagine the murdered corpses of three generations of married couples. They were lying on their backs, quite still, and it was they who made the crimson quilts so ominously

bulge ! . . . I shuddered and withdrew ; the procession re-formed. Resigning myself to remaining in the same room, after all, as the *petite bête* and his brothers, I was very firm in the matter of clean sheets. Madame and Adolphe departed, leaving me with vague assurances. Another wait ; then the reappearance of Adolphe alone, in great distress. Would I figure to myself that both the *patron* and Madame's mother-in-law were ill, that Madame was much worried, and, in short, the sheets could not be found at that hour ? There was, however, another room which he would show me.

I expressed a hope that it was better than the last, and was plaintively reassured—it was a perfect room. We went out again in the rain, which had kept up, as a kind of chorus to these proceedings, a melancholy drip, drip ; climbed up another outside staircase, and entered the upper floor of the hotel proper. Here were greater signs of comfort, a polished floor and papered walls. Adolphe opened one of the rooms with a tremendous flourish : “ V’la, M’sieu,” he said, and put the candle down on the chest of drawers while I looked round. Evidently it was the best bedroom ; the floor was polished, and skin rugs slithered about over its surface ; the bed was massive and newer in appearance than the others ; the pillow-slip of a recognisable linen, and frilled. But somehow I was not at ease. I almost suspected that someone—the mother-in-law, perhaps—had been hastily bundled away to make room for me. I took the candle and advanced, full of suspicion. This was too much for Adolphe, who had taken the whole matter greatly to heart. His little blue eyes filled with tears, and, laying one hand on the bed-clothes

and pressing the other against his shirt-front, he looked up at me, saying brokenly, "M'sieu, je vous jure que c'est propre ; je vous jure que c'est propre."

We considered one another gravely, and—hopeless sentimentalist that I am—I squashed my unworthy suspicions, and dismissed him with a franc, for which he shook me by the hand. But Adolphe will, I fear, come to a bad end ; that night of horror, over which I must draw a veil, proved him to be a false, untruthful boy. . . .

At the hour that I was up and dressed there was no coffee to be had, but there was sunshine, and I went out to examine Digoin under more favourable conditions. The only redeeming feature that I could discover was its back gardens, fairylands shut in by warm stone walls, all glowing with colour, with corners full of a rich green shade, and trees from which hung the swings soon to be set in motion by the little feet now curled up in bed behind the green shutters. These gardens sloped down to the towing-path of the canal along which I walked. Already the washerwomen were pounding and thumping at their boards : a low, evil-looking, slatternly set of women, unlike any that I saw in any other part of France. The canal is shaded by two straight rows of chestnuts planted close together, a cool green avenue in the midst of which the line of water stagnates and smells.

But no reasonable child could object to being brought up in one of those back gardens ; for the rest there is little to be said for Digoin. It is on the right bank of the Loire, and has some commercial importance through being a kind of canal junction. The town is situated

between two arms of the Canal du Centre, of which one enters the Loire and the other joins on to the *Canal lateral à la Loire* and the canal between Digoin and Roanne, by means of a *pont-aqueduc* over the river. Just below Digoin the Loire is joined by the Arroux, its most considerable tributary hitherto. For the rest Digoin has about seven thousand people, is noted for its faïence and has disagreeable station officials. I don't know when I have left a place with so much joy!

CHAPTER VII

NEVERS

TO get to Nevers by train from Digoin you are supposed to go first to Moulins—an old cathedral town of considerable importance, about the same size as Nevers and situated on the Allier, in the province of the Bourbonnais. If through wilfulness, or for your vow's sake, you elect to go by way of Gilly-sur-Loire and Cercy-la-Tour, you have only got yourself to blame if you don't like the adventure.

To Gilly the train ambles down a grass-grown track through a slightly undulating country, rich with corn-fields and pleasantly broken up with trees and shady lanes, on the borderland of Burgundy and the Bourbonnais. The river is swift, in these parts, but in the summer leaves half its bed uncovered, while its sand-banks justify the epithet that Hérédia applies to it somewhere—"la blonde Loire." At Gilly you change. At the middle platform I found drawn up four battered carriages with windows of the old "coach" shape, rounded at the bottom, and paint that blistered in the sun. My compartment was as burning as a greenhouse when I got inside; the grey cloth seat almost too hot to sit down on. The notice stuck on the cracked windows of all the other compartments of this particular

wagon, "compartiment condamné," gave a curious air of ruin to the little train. In the process of time an engine, with a tall funnel, a large piston very low down, and a displayed collection of entrails in the shape of winding yellow pipes, waddled up very much as it were on all fours and joined the ruinous coaches with a jolt that nearly put the finishing touches to their decay.

Leaving Gilly where the Loire, studded, as usual, with great sand-banks, is crossed by two bridges near together, the train started on its precarious journey through a country that became sometimes parklike, with green stretches of lovely woodland, sometimes an open expanse golden with broom. At Bourbon-Lancy, a few stations from Gilly, I had to turn out again. The river is about a mile below the station, at the small commune of Le Fourneau, and the long white *route nationale* crosses it by a suspension bridge. Here the Loire is broad and swift, with large, uncovered banks of gravel, but looked navigable enough for light boats going with the stream. The only boats I noticed were a punt and two small flat-bottomed barges.

The principal houses in this little hamlet were two inns on opposite sides of the road. One was built of red brick and shadeless, the other was an old square stone house with two green tables overhung by two chestnut trees, on either side of its front door. Here (but in the coolness of the big bar-parlour), facing a long announcement containing the clauses of the law against public drunkenness, I ate a modest omelette, before exploring the town. Several babies, who had escaped from their mothers' charge while she was cooking, came and performed slow somersaults in front of me, and one

tiny girl succeeded most successfully in standing on her head. She then regarded me, waiting, no doubt, for some sign of approval, with a chubby finger in the corner of her mouth.

Bourbon-Lancy is an old town of about the same size as Paray-le-Monial, which enjoys a certain measure of popularity as a watering-place and *station thermale*. It is nearly two miles away from the station on a commanding hill which dominates the valley of the Borne, a tributary of the Loire. The principal church is modern Gothic, but boasts a picture by Puvis de Chavannes. There are some good old houses, particularly one with a carved façade dating from the sixteenth century, which adjoins the old Tour de l'Horloge. The Place de l'Hôtel de Ville is a little downward-sloping square with a modest seventeenth-century town hall, built of stone. The best inn in the place—apart from the Hôtel de l'Établissement Thermal near the baths—is said to be the Hôtel de la Poste; though I cannot speak of either from personal experience.

After passing under the bridge of Le Fourneau the Loire receives the waters of the Cressonne, widens to make two big islands at a spot south of Chârrin, and bears north-westwards to make another at Decize. The railway, however, takes the traveller inexorably to Cercy-la-Tour, past little stations where the wives of the Brigadiers-Poseurs stand at the doors of their little houses and watch the trains, shading their eyes with their hands. Once again I was turned out on to the platform and made to change. The platform happened to be quite full when I tried to jump down on to it in answer to "Tout le monde descend." It was full of soldiers,

laughing, perspiring, and swearing in their heavy blue coats with red epaulettes, and it was barely possible to turn round until a long train of cattle-trucks arrived and bore them, non-protesting, away. I cannot imagine an English Tommy travelling contentedly in a cattle-truck ; but then our soldiers have all the arrogance of volunteers. Cercy is a station on the way to Château-Chinon and the hill country of the Morvan, and takes the latter part of its name from the great tower which is the only remnant of its ancient citadel. It is the most celebrated centre for horse-breeding in the Nivernais ; and its great horse fairs are much frequented by buyers from different parts of the world.

From Cercy it is about nine miles, down the valley of the Aron, to Decize—fine old town of about five thousand people huddled on the rocky knoll of an island in the Loire. Decize stands high above the surrounding country, its group of roofs, towers, and spires encircled by trees, and is at the edge of a far-stretching forest land. Old engravings show it with a girdle of walls and towers with pointed roofs, though these have now disappeared and made way for the usual boulevard. The church of St. Aré is old and interesting, with an eleventh-century choir and a double crypt dating from Carolingian times and containing St. Aré's tomb. There are also the ruins of a castle of the counts of Nevers with a belvidere ; and a number of other interesting old buildings. A curious tribute to Decize (" Je ne sai vil miex assise ") is paid in an old Conte Morale by Jehan le Gallois :

" Jehan le Gallois nous la conte
Qu'il ot eu la terre de Conte
De Nevers l riche borgois
Qui mont et sage et cortois."



DECIZE.

Then the castle is mentioned :

“ Lors s'en part iriez et plains d'ire
Si s'en va parmi le chastel,
Qui mont seoit et bien et bel ;
Je ne sai vil miex assise ;
Si est apelée Dysise,
Et siet en une isle de Loire.”

Its situation at the junction of two canals and on the railway line between Nevers and Chagny has given Decize some commercial importance, and the industrial suburbs have grown up of the faubourg d'Allier on the left bank, where the lateral canal joins the Loire by a branch which allows the boats to be towed across to the opening of the Nivernais Canal on the right bank ; of the faubourg Saint-Privé, built on the banks of the Aron, which joins the Loire at Decize ; and of the village of St. Léger-des-Vignes, on the right bank, close to the railway station. The various factories and forges near Decize form the first links of a chain bordering the Loire as far as Briare, of foundries, ironworks, and manufactories of (among other things) faïence and “ pearl ” buttons. The iron industry, however, will soon have passed away from the Nivernais, except for a few large centres, as completely as it has passed away from Sussex. The country is spotted with the ugly ruins of furnaces and smoke-stacks, and out of the many hundred ironworks flourishing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, those at Imphy and Fourchambault are the only two of importance which still remain. On the right bank of the Loire, between Decize and Nevers, there were numerous small forges at one time. The supply of wood was inexhaustible, and the little streams running down to join the river provided the motive force to work the

engines, and enabled the metal to be washed. These forges, have now, however, practically all disappeared.

The next station beyond Decize is the pretty village of Sougy, with the ruins of the fourteenth-century castle of Rosemont on the low hill overlooking the river. The Loire at Sougy and for many miles below Nevers, though wide, has great stretches of uncovered sand. In the flood season, however, it more than fills its bed, and rolls a stupendous flood of water which often does an immense amount of damage.

After passing Imphy (a town whose prosperity has often been gravely threatened), which has facing it on the left bank the fourteenth-century château of Cheve-non; the Nièvre, the small stream which gives its name to the department, is crossed, and you arrive at Nevers.

On reaching Nevers you are conscious, all at once, of a sudden change. You are no longer in unknown France. Nevers is a regular "resort," frequented by motorists, conquered by America, and taken to the bosom of Messrs. Cook and Son. This fact suggests itself subtly. I cannot say that I saw any English people in the streets; or any indication of the change worth specially mentioning, unless perhaps that I noticed for the first time on my pilgrimage the presence of a certain ubiquitous English periodical on the station bookstall. Nevers is smaller by some eight or nine thousand people than Roanne, and it has no tramcars, but what a splendid, dignified appearance it makes! Many another traveller has made this rather obvious remark, including Young, who visited it in January, 1790. "Nevers makes a fine appearance," he writes, "rising proudly from the Loire; but, on the first entrance, it is like a thousand other

places. Towns, thus seen, resemble a group of women, huddled close together ; you see their nodding plumes and sparkling gems, till you fancy that ornament is the herald of beauty ; but, on a nearer inspection, the faces are too often but common clay."

Of my own arrival at Nevers I have the happiest recollections. I descended from the station, indeed, like a royal personage. (I left it, in the process of time, like an undesirable alien.) To take, however, the arrival first. The brassiest of brass bands was installed in the station yard, playing a march of triumph, the sunshine poured down over everything, the air had a momentary freshness and it was excellent to be young. Officials walked about exuding beneficence and courtesy, and the music threw one's head back, making the step go briskly. I felt as though I were being "received." I was perhaps prejudiced by these musical honours, but I certainly took an immediate fancy to Nevers, a fancy which, like many other too hasty judgments, time has not altogether confirmed. The road leading uphill from the station is commonplace enough, perhaps, but at the top of the hill is a broad open *place*, the Place Carnot, with a lovely wooded promenade on the left-hand side, and on the right, the cathedral and the old palace of the Counts of Nevers. This was the first real "Château de la Loire" that I had seen : a charming medley of fantastic turrets, pointed roofs, and elaborately carved masonry. It is now the Palais de Justice, and the Commissary of Police inhabits it ; but of him later. Just then, in the bright morning sun, the whole place seemed almost too good to be true.

The château, and the cathedral of St. Cyr with its

lofty and beautiful tower and lovely side-chapels, are situated on a plateau which dominates the valley of the Loire. The bed of the Loire is here chiefly an immense expanse of yellow sand, in the summer, shot with gleaming runlets of water ; but as Ardouin-Dumazet says : “ Vienne l’hiver et l’on aura l’impression d’un Mississipi, tant le flot sera puissant.” A pleasant, formal French garden lies between the cathedral and the château, increasing the charm of this city within a city, this beautiful “ heart ” of Nevers. Walking to the end of the Place de la République, in front of the château you come to the edge of the steep declivity and look down on the old parts of the town underneath, and across the broad *fonds* of the Loire, which are terminated only by a line of low hills in the far distance. These low-lying, desolate tracts are studded with ponds left by the floods, called *gours*. The vegetation, such as it is, consists chiefly of *osiers* and dwarf poplars, and efforts at cultivation have only been successful at rare points.

From this raised plateau containing the central *place*, bounded by the steep slope on the side nearest the river, the streets of Nevers descend in all directions. The principal street is the rue du Commerce, which runs down from the Prefecture, passing the beautiful Romanesque church of St. Étienne, to the Nièvre. It boasts a singularly ponderous triumphal arch, erected by one of the Dukes of Nevers in honour of Louis XV, after the battle of Fontenoy. Its inscription is by Voltaire, and he was paid 500 francs for the four lines. They are hardly inspired :

“ Au grand homme modeste, au plus doux des vainqueurs,
Le père de l’Etat, au maître de nos cœurs,”

on one side, and on the other :

“ A ce grand monument qu'éleva l'Abondance,
Reconnaissez Nevers et jugez de la France.”

The park on the left of the Place Carnot—to which I have referred—contains one of the coolest, most cathedral-like promenades that are to be found in France. It was planted by one of the last Dukes of Nevers. I remember the blackness of the trees at sunset, and how you could see the pink and green and gold in the sky through the sombre, clearly-outlined trunks. Old men and women sat motionless on the seats in the gloaming, and a bugle-call from the barracks at the top was all there was to break the stillness.

Several happy days slipped by in exploring Nevers. Much of my time was spent in the narrow streets of the older part of the town in the neighbourhood of the Porte de Croux—a fourteenth-century tower, relic of the fortifications, which contains a *musée lapidaire*. Near here used to dwell a colony of Italian *faïenciers*, brought from Italy by one of the Gonzagas of Mantua who became Dukes of Nevers and made the city one of the most flourishing art-centres in France. Up till the time of the Revolution and even well on into the nineteenth century, the *faïencerie* of Nevers gave employment to a considerable number of artists and work-people. They lived all together in this quarter of the town, close to the ramparts and the Porte de Croux, and had even a church of their own, the Church of St. Genest, which has now been turned into a *brasserie*. There were four faïence factories still in existence in 1864; there remains but one to-day, which, however, strives to preserve the ancient traditions and numbers

among its workpeople, some who can trace their descent from those Italian artists who settled in the city more than three centuries ago. There are many references to the *potiers* in local folk-poetry, and I noted down one song called the "Chanson de Patouillot : potier de Nevers."

"Tes rubans barivolants,
Belle rose,
Tes rubans barivolants—
Belle Rose au rosier blanc.

Quand elles sont gentes,
Reveillons les donc, ces filles,
Quand elles sont pentes, (ugly)
Laissez les dormir.
Alle a les yeux bien terluissants
Tout comme deux pierr's à gniamant
Si ben que l'écarlate
Qu'est un rouge ben fin,
N'est que d'la couleur varte
Auprès de son biau teint.

C'est les filles de Château-Chinon,
Les petites Morvandelles,
Qui ont vendu leur cotte et cotillon
Pour avoir des dentelles !"

In addition to its faïence, Nevers was at one time very celebrated for the manufacture of glass toys, an industry doubtless carried on by some of the Italian workers whom the Gonzagas had attracted to that city. In a rather dull little work entitled "Remarks in the Grande Tour of France and Italy, lately performed by a Person of Quality" (1692), is the statement that "Nevers, the chief city of the Province of Nivernois, is as famous for pretty little toys made in Glass, as Moulins in Bourbonnais is for Scissors and Iron-work."

Nevers boasted at one time an important cannon foundry, now suppressed, though there are still foundries and workshops in the faubourg de la Pique. Among its manufactures, the production of glue and artificial manures have some importance. But the ironworks of Nevers are decayed and overshadowed in comparison with those of its near neighbours, Imphy and Fourchambault. The town has anything but a manufacturing appearance; indeed, as I mentioned before, it is quickly evident that it is well in the recognised tourist routes. It is possible that this fact may account for the excellence of its two principal cafés, the Grand Café in the rue du Commerce and the Café Glacier. It was at the latter, I think, that I heard two amusing singers from the Boîte-à-Fursy who were on a summer *tournée*. Later they were to greet my entry into a café at Blois with the familiar musical honours :

"Soyez le bienvenu
A la Boite à Fursy !"

Just then, after some weeks of rustication, they seemed like all urbanity and its joys.

I did not pay much attention, I must confess, to the Loire, during my first few days at Nevers, but on the morning that I had settled on for my departure I got up very early, crossed the Place Carnot, and went down a quiet street, past the lovely little Baroque church of the Visitation with its richly carved and ornamented west front, into the rue du Commerce, which I descended till I got to the Quai de la Loire. This quay flanks actually the Nièvre, until the smaller river joins the Loire just before the great stone bridge of fifteen arches, which bears across the *route nationale*

to Bourges and Moulins. I can never resist bridges, there are no places like them for the confirmed idler. I "hung," almost alone, on the bridge at Nevers, listening idly to the whacking and thumping that came, a little softened by distance, from the washing barges downstream. It occurred to me that none but the lightest of boats could hope to get through that bridge, and even then only through the extreme right-hand arch, that is to say the arch nearest the bank, on the Nevers side. I sat on the parapet, opened my pocket-book, and made a pencil note to this effect in case (as I hope and intend it may) it should happen to me to descend the Loire again, in a canvas canoe. Having finished my little memorandum I glanced up as I was shutting my notebook. I put the book away hurriedly and stood to attention. An elegant military man in a black, well-fitting tunic with red knee breeches and gleaming boots, holding a yellow notched cane in one of his kid-gloved hands in such a way that it stuck straight up his back like a poker, was eyeing me suspiciously. He had wintry grey eyes, bushy eyebrows, an iron-grey imperial. Yet he looked, I must admit it, a trifle too homely and bourgeois for the popular notion of the military officer. Seeing that he regarded me with an unconcealed interest, I thought it would be excusable of me if I did the same. The usual laws of courtesy might perhaps be waived for a few moments. I examined him; and I am only sorry that—soldier as he was of my beloved France, most admirable, most civilised of countries—I could not admire him more. He lacked altogether the distinction of carriage which has been observable in such of our soldiers as I have seen, and he

certainly did not look any more highly intellectual. I walked on quickly across the bridge till the idea came to me suddenly to stop and turn. I did so; and found myself confronting the iron-grey officer, who sank down on to his heels again and scowled. The whole *décor* was clearly arranged for a tensely dramatic scene—only the dialogue was lacking. “And now, sir, damn you, an explanation!” I ought perhaps to have said, had my French been equal to it, or at all events have exclaimed “Carramba!” or “Corpo di Bacco!” and slapped my hip pocket. I do not possess a hip pocket; it was all I could do to refrain from laughing. The officer turned quickly away, presented to me a bristling and inimical back and walked off and out of sight. For the moment I forgot him. I went back to the Place Mossé that faces the bridge, looked at the ruins of the Romanesque church of St. Sauveur, then continued by the river till I came to the Tour Goguin—round tower with a pointed roof like that of a Provençal windmill, that is one of the few remains of the ancient fortifications. I sought, in the growing heat, the shade of two even rows of tall trees, with bare thin trunks and thick bushy tops that shut out the sun, and walked downstream as far as the bridge that carries the railway line across the river. The Loire is very swift just here and abnormally sandy, giving the effect of sprawling anyhow over the countryside. The boats I saw were for the most part long black punts with rough poles; the more elaborate craft, of which there were a few, had a large steering oar with a rudder-shaped blade, projecting from the stern.

As I turned back towards the centre of the city, I heard the noise of a military band, and had to wait

while a whole regiment passed down the rue de la Grippe. Apart from them, save for a workman in corduroys and a blue shirt, I had the road to myself, but I was more than surprised by the amount of attention I received. The entire regiment glowered at me. The men nudged one another as though to say (regardless of grammar), "That's him." The officers twirled their moustaches and looked as if they intended to eat me. I felt once more that it was an occasion when the stricter code might be relaxed in favour of something more homely and agreeable to the natural man; and when they looked at me I looked at them. They were in undress uniform—a kind of light, biscuit-coloured hollands—and certainly seemed a useful if rather slouching lot. The officers disappointed me. I examined them with all respect, but for some inexplicable reason they looked as though it was as much as they could do to refrain from a sabre charge. If glances could have killed I should have died a thousand deaths, and I was quite glad to see the last of so many spiteful backs. I returned to my hotel, packed and proceeded in good time to the station (having sent my luggage on in front), in order to catch a convenient train for Tracy-Sancerre. I felt sorry to be leaving such a pleasant city as Nevers; I had not, however, quite left it. As I was walking in a leisurely way into the station yard, a hand was laid with such force on my shoulder that my cigarette nearly fell out of my mouth.

"Pardon, M'sieu," said an individual in white duck trousers, a dark tunic with red adornments and a peaked cap crossed, like a hot-cross bun, with red stripes. He had long black moustaches and did the

"Fierce Glance" act. Feeling like a conspirator in musical comedy, I took another cigarette and assured the official that it was of no consequence; but he proceeded to cross-question me. Why had I come to Nevers?

"Oh, just to have a look round," I replied ingenuously. The official nodded his head.

"You have been noticed," he said curtly. I felt in *my* turn for the blond ornament of my upper lip.

"Naturally enough," I replied, "the girls do dog one. . . ."

"On the bridge," he snapped, "by the Commandant. . . ." This last remark was a revelation; things were getting serious.

"Would it derange you," he asked, with an access of politeness, "to accompany me to the bureau of the Commissary? It is quite close." I replied that I had twenty-five minutes before the departure of my train and that I should be delighted. We set off up the road, the cynosure of every eye. At the bottom of the Avenue de la Gare a posse of four gentlemen in white 'duck trousers, black moustaches, and hot-cross bun hats appeared from nowhere, and fell in behind us. Individual *agents* seemed to be stationed at intervals all the way up the road to the château. The arrangements for my capture were indeed flattering in their completeness. On my arrival at the *bureau*, I was made to wait in a dark room full of scowlers till the moment of my examination arrived. They scowled horribly! It must be confessed that I felt extremely guilty; but I wondered how it was possible that I could look as naughty as they appeared to think

me. After a while I was summoned before the Commissary. Up a winding mediaeval staircase I was led—it might quite well have been to a chief executioner's operating room—and eventually a door was thrown open and I found myself in a sixteenth-century apartment that made me positively gasp with delight. Such a chimney-piece and ceiling, such old carved oak! A subdued sunlight came through the casements making strips of gold across the covers of some of the leather-bound quartos which lay on a solid table under the window. I guessed whose room it was I had stumbled into and looked for the *Sieur de Montaigne* with his elegantly pointed beard (style *Henri IV*) sitting back in his oak chair resting his head against his left hand, and with his shoe caressing the hound at his feet. The *Sieur de Montaigne* wished me a polite good morning and bade me be seated; alas! he was, after all, the Commissary. The Commissary, too, had a pointed grey beard; but his shiny frock-coat and the tiny bit of red ribbon fixed in his button-hole prevented him from being picturesque. He was business-like.

"You have been observed?" he suggested, raising an eyebrow like a question mark.

"What at?" I asked in some trepidation; there are so many things about which even the best of us prefers secrecy.

"Come, come," remarked my cross-examiner. "You were making notes on the bridge; the Commandant observed you. He took you for a spy." Fierce glance.

"The English must be piffling spies," I remarked, "if they make their notes in the middle of a bridge under the eyes of an officer in uniform. The Com-

mandant's conclusions appear to have been arrived at a little too easily." I produced the illegible notebook, handed it across, and suggested, modestly, that I was a mere author, addicted, when possible, to canoeing. Tableau! Contempt for military intellect, combined with enthusiasm for "Le Sport," worked the most sudden and gratifying change. Stealthily we commented on the idiocy of military men in general (as compared with the astuteness of the police), and on the folly of M. le Commandant in particular. We discussed the *Entente Cordiale*, we paid "tributes" to the beauties of our respective countries, the admirable virtues possessed by our respective nations, declared that our friendship in the future should even rise as far as the exchange of picture postcards. Visiting-cards, at the moment, changed hands ceremonially; we bowed—and I was free. Cheated of their prey, as it were, the gendarmes glowered at me as I passed out and raced to catch my train. I caught it—not without relief. In spite of the Commissary's visiting-card, which I held in my hand as a kind of talisman, I felt horribly as if at Nevers, I had been—found out!

CHAPTER VIII

SANCERRE

FOR adventurous persons, the pleasantest way of proceeding down the Loire from Nevers during the dry season, when it is at its least dangerous, must be on board a punt or serviceable canoe. The stream runs swiftly, and there are dangers of quicksands and whirlpools under bridges, but none that two men skilled in the use of river craft need fear. An 'unsinkable' folding boat of the Accordion type, that I was able to experiment with on a lower reach, should do very well. It is not an unwieldy addition to one's luggage, and can be fitted with a tent that makes it pleasant to sleep in on a summer night. It draws hardly any water—you could almost float it in your bath—while it has at the same time sufficient beam for safety. The customs dues on these boats amount to about forty-five francs, but this sum is returnable if the boat is brought back within three months. But perhaps the safer way would be to hire one of the local punts, especially built to suit the river's peculiarities, and float downstream in it.

The railway keeps very close to the Loire, forsaking it only for some miles between Fourchambault and La Charité, when, cutting off a bend of the river, it runs

through the watering-place of Pougues-les-Eaux. Fourchambault is a town of 6020 inhabitants, engaged in the iron industry; almost a suburb of Nevers. The Loire here is augmented by the waters of the Allier, which joins it at a point about midway between Nevers and Fourchambault. The Allier, like the Loire, has its source in the Cevennes. It forms two-thirds of the combined stream at their junction, has a more even flow of water, and is also perhaps a trifle longer than the Loire when it flows into it.

Pougues is a watering-place which—perhaps because it is on the way to Vichy—has never quite succeeded. It is situated in surroundings of great peacefulness, in a lovely country of woodland and forest, of low, tree-covered hills sloping on one side to the broad plain, with the Loire doubling through it. From the top of the vine-clad hill above the town, called the Mont Givre, is a lovely view of the country-side. The valley of the Loire lies outspread, “mystérieusement vaste,” between the low hills of Berry, black with forests, and those of Nivernais, equally tree-covered. Pougues itself is in a pretty vale: a vale of peace. In the Park of l’Etablissement des Bains are several hotels, a casino, baths, and drinking-fountains. The cold springs for which the place is frequented contain carbonates of lime and iron. There is an annexe of the principal hotel on the plateau of Mont Givre above the town. Pougues is on the main road between Nevers and La Charité, the next town of importance on the Loire, seventeen miles from Nevers and nine from Pougues. The *route nationale* to La Charité runs, with an exasperating straightness, through a verdant

country-side before reaching the Loire, skirting on its way the vine-clad heights of Tronsanges. Road and railway, when the Loire is attained, run side by side along the bank of the river, which is here vast in extent, though in the dry seasons a thin stream of water covers only a small part of its great bed of yellow sand. When the water is high, the spectacle is said to be one of the most magnificent in France. The plateau above the river, across which the road runs, has been denuded of trees and turned into arable land; its golden corn-fields stretch to the edge of the great forests of Nièvre.

The town of La Charité, quickly reached, is still one of the most delightful in the Nivernais. Before the Wars of Religion, in which it suffered much, it must have been a place of great splendour and beauty. It owes its name to a Cluniac Priory founded in the eighth century, of which little now remains. The abbey buildings were reconstructed in the eighteenth century, in the formal but, to modern eyes, agreeable style of that epoch, but were afterwards almost entirely destroyed by a fire which also grievously injured the church. Still, of the monastic buildings besides the church there is yet to be seen a fifteenth-century gateway, some ogival galleries supported on graceful columns, and two square halls with richly ornamented roofs that were—at least, till recently—used by a wine merchant.

The church of Sainte-Croix-Notre-Dame, with its exquisite fragments, that enable one to imagine the beauties of the twelfth-century abbey church as it used to be, is a sad reminder of La Charité's departed glories. Only the apsidal chapels, transept, and the

- beautiful square tower that rises from it, remain of the original church ; the nave dates from 1695, and



La Charité

is aptly described by one writer as being “navrante de banalité.”

La Charité has greatly sunk in importance, since

before the Wars of Religion it boasted 10,000 inhabitants; twice its present number. It presents a charming appearance, for, unlike most of the towns by the Loire, which have their centres away from the stream, it turns its face towards the river. Houses look down on to a beautiful quay; and an ancient stone bridge, with powerful sharp-pointed stone piers, carries the principal street, the rue des Hôtelleries, across to the faubourg on the island in the middle of the stream, which has been likened to a ship at anchor. This faubourg is in turn joined by an iron bridge to the district of Berry.

Ardouin-Dumazet writes thus of the general appearance of the town: "Les tours de l'église, les ruines des remparts, l'ampithéâtre des toits, donnent grande allure à ce décor citadin. Le tableau devait être plus saisissant avant les grands désastres qui ont fait perdre à la ville son rang parmi les plus importantes du Centre. Alors l'église dressait une masse majestueuse au-dessus des toits, d'autres flèches, d'autres tours jaillassaient à côté d'elle, une enceinte flanquée de tours enfermait la cité et en accentuait le caractère." On the ruins of the old town, a new, rather commonplace town has sprung up, which somehow contrives to give a great air of commercial activity. Its corn market is important; and the town is a centre for curious industries, such as the making of files, bell-founding, and the manufacture of imitation marble. This commercial spirit in the Charitois has kept the place alive and vigorous, in spite of the disappearance of navigation from the Loire, and the absence of the *diligences*, which, like the stage coaches of an English

town, used to lend animation to its high street. Motor-cars, however, are perhaps commoner now in that same street than ever *diligences* were in the past; for it forms part of the great highway between Paris and Vichy.

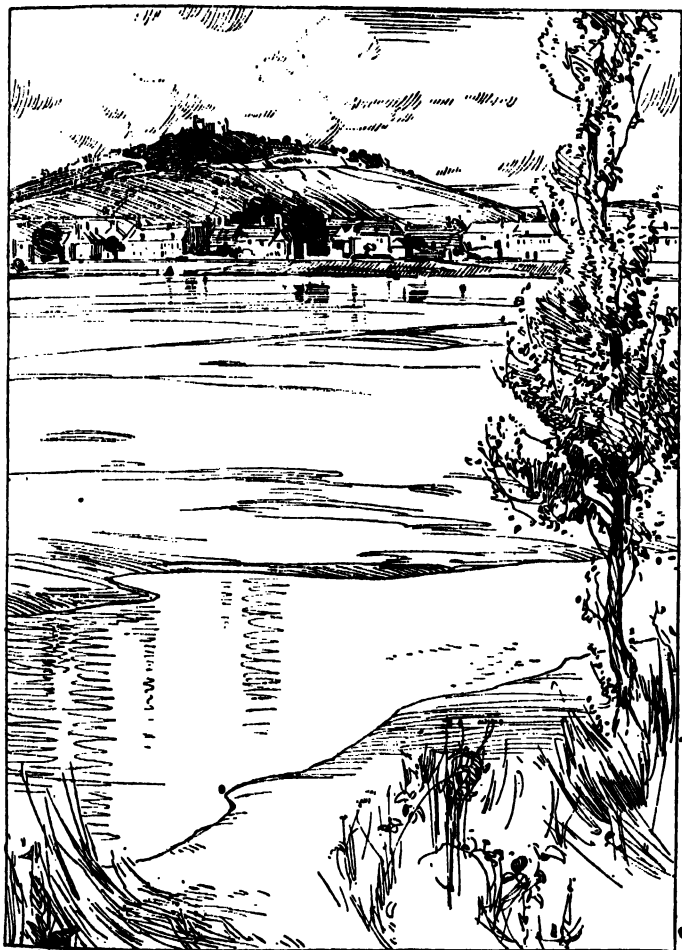
After La Charité the river grows still broader. On the right-hand side, in the Nivernais, the plateau terminates in steep slopes. Opposite, in Berry, the valley is a large alluvial plain, thinly sprinkled with farms where intensive methods of cultivation prevail. The scenery in the Nivernais is more interesting and varied; small streams from the forest wind at the bottom of charming valleys. Calcareous rock is quarried in this neighbourhood—particularly on the banks of a lovely little river—the Mazon—and the beds stretch beyond Pouilly.

On the outskirts of Pouilly the aspect changes, woods and sheep pastures and arable land giving way before the vine. The vine covers all the soft undulations of the country-side round the hamlet of Charenton, which is entirely inhabited by vine-dressers. The vineyards sloping towards the Loire are exceptionally rich, their opulence contrasting curiously with the shrunken river, sliding down between its vast, bare sand-banks. The vineyards of Pouilly and its neighbourhood are, indeed, among the most celebrated in the valley of the Loire, disputing the premier position with the *crus* even of Touraine and Anjou. Its white wines (which must not be confused with the Burgundian Pouilly) are among the finest that France produces. The village of Mesves, through which the road to Pouilly runs—it is about four miles from Pouilly, and boasts an

interesting twelfth-century tithe-barn—has also good white wines. Pouilly itself is a prosperous little town, which suffers in interest from being on a white, dusty highway. Its chief attraction is the splendid panoramic view of the Loire which it affords—the Loire with its green islands, sand-banks, and wandering branches, and in the distance the little mountains of Berry, and, foremost among them, the surprising, dominating peak of Sancerre.

The situation of Sancerre is surely one of the most remarkable of any town in France. Proudly perched on a green, abrupt hill, it looks down over the valley of the great river and over the green undulations of the vineyards which surround it. On one who has travelled for many days through the plains, through a landscape never more than amiable or gracious, the sudden appearance of Sancerre on its hill cannot fail to make a profound impression. It is the return of the grandiose to the landscape, in a place where you had not expected it. You would feel the same if you saw a Turner, at the Tate Gallery, hung by accident in one of the Chantrey rooms. The station of this surprising town bears the double name of Tracy-Sancerre. Tracy is a small town with a fifteenth-century château, on the right bank of the river. From the station an omnibus conducts the traveller to Sancerre, which is situated about three miles away. The road crosses the river by the long suspension bridge, crosses also the lateral canal, and, traverses the little town of Saint-Satur, which possesses the choir of a magnificent fifteenth-century abbey church. After leaving Saint-Satur, the omnibus, with you inside it, passes under the viaduct

, bearing the railway from Bourges, and begins to climb the side of the hill on which Sancerre is placed. Baedeker

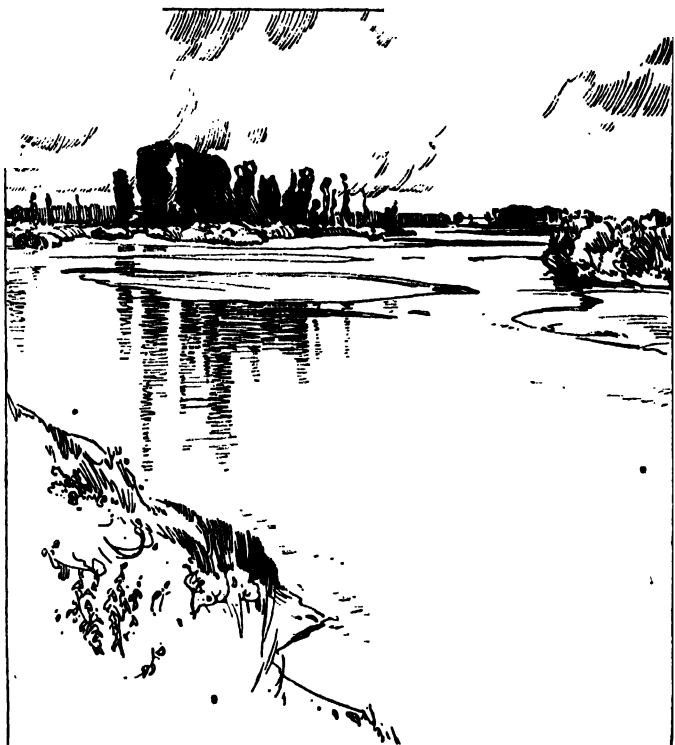


Sancerre

describes Sancerre as "old and ill-built," so that lovers of curious, unexploited places, who know also their Baedeker, will have a notion of what to expect. But,

no—it is better still. No one could anticipate the views. From the terrace in the park of the modern château, home of the Uzès family (where also is a relic of the fortifications which dates from the fourteenth century and bears locally the name of the Tour des Fiefs), the three provinces of Berry, Nivernais, and Orléanais lie outspread before you. But even finer views are to be had from the peaks which rise to the south of Sancerre. One of these, l'Orme-au-Loup, is topped by some reddish cliffs which have a covering of heather and golden broom, and look very fine from the river. From its summit is a charming view over Sancerre and all round, across an expanse of country that is apparently boundless, except on the side where it is limited by the distant mountains of the Morvan. The Loire forms the greatest beauty of the landscape—golden, island-choked and broad. At the foot of the hill villages show themselves, and appear here and there among the vineyards, which cover all the lower slopes. One can discern Ménétréol half concealed in a hollow, Thauvenay whose red roofs alone are visible, and farther off the two scattered hamlets of Saint-Bouize and Couargues, which have found their place in literature in a book by Monsieur de Montalivet. Beyond them is the château de Lagrange, set in the wooded expanses of its vast park, an estate which the Montalivet family still owns. In every fold and hollow of the hills are villages and hamlets. Just opposite you is the promontory of Tracy, jutting proudly out; Pouilly can be seen beyond it, standing white among its vines; and, vaguer and less distinct, the weather-beaten towers of La Charité, backed by the bare plateaux of the Donziois, and the low tree-lined

hills of the Nivernais. Turning northwards, one sees the circle of Sancerre with its curious narrow old houses huddled together; then the Loire again; Cosne with its wooded islands; and the great plateau of La Puisaye



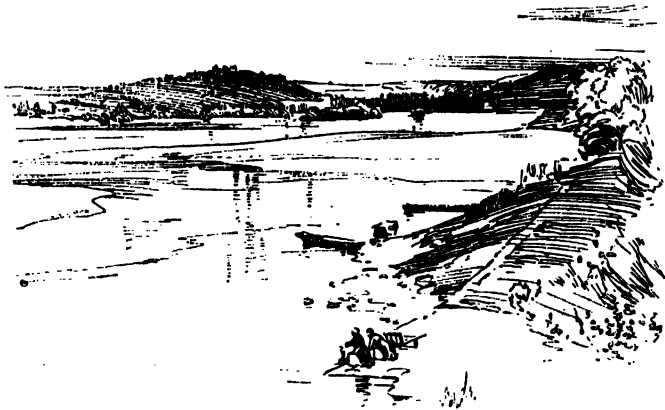
The Loire near Pouilly-sur-Loire

all dotted with villages and towns. There are no hills on this side to impede the view, which stretches even to where the great forest of Orléans grows blue on the horizon.

The heather and broom on l'Orme-au-Loup make it

a lovely resting-place ; and when you tire of the view you may recline on the softest of pillows and look up at the sky, or even watch merely the blue smoke rising from the end of your cigarette, or the grey smoke from your lips.

During the Wars of Religion, Sancerre was for Protestantism and Henry of Navarre. It was naturally a very strong place, and withstood several sieges,



At Tracy

of which one at least is famous. This was in 1573; it lasted for eight months, and was accompanied by a famine, the records of which make horrible reading. When I add that it has an inn—the Hôtel du Point du Jour et de l'Écu—I suppose I have given it away completely. Yet I doubt if ever a large percentage of the hundreds of thousands of people, who in very year notice its surprising aspect from the carriage windows as the train rushes them to Vichy and Auvergne, will

have the curiosity to break their journey here on the way home. Certainly they would be well rewarded if they did.

I think it was at Sancerre that I heard the roguish folk-song which is still sung in out-of-the-way places throughout Berry and the Nivernais : " Oh, j'ai piqué mon rouge."

" Oh, j'ai piqué mon rouge, mon jaune aussi mon blanc :
Oh, petit vent de galerne donn' moi du beau temps.

—Allons-eh !

Mon père m'envoi-z à Nantes,
Y vendre seigle et froment—

—Allons-eh !

A trente sous est mon seigle,
Un écu mon froment.

—Allons-eh !

L' premier qui m' les demande
C'est l' fils d'un avocat.

—Allons-eh !

Il a bien mis sept ans
Pour m' compter mon argent—

—Allons-eh !

Tout au bout des sept ans,
Ma mère est accouchée.

—Allons-eh !

Mon père me dit ' Garçon,
' Que faire de cet argent? '

—Allons-eh !

' De cet argent, mon père,
' Achetons un berceau,

—Allons-eh !

' Un berceau en ivoire,
' Pour mettr' l'enfant dedans. '

—Allons-eh ! "

And for a literary interest to Sancerre, does not Villon mention it in the "Grand Testament" when writing about his sweetheart ?

"Item m'amour, ma chère Rose,
Ne luy laisse ne cœur ne foye :
Elle aymeroit mieulx autre chose,
Combien qu'elle ait assez monnoye :
Quoy ? une grande bourse de soye,
Pleine d'escuz, profonde et large :
Mais, pendu soit-il, que je soye,
Qui luy lairra escu ne targe.

Car elle en a, sans moy, assez.
Mais de cela, il ne m'en chault ;
Mes grans deduietz en sont passez ;
Plus n'en ay le cropion chauld.
Si m'en desmetz aux hoirs Michault,
Qui fut nommé le bon fouterre.
Priez pour luy, faictes ung sault :
A Saint-Satur gist, soubz Sancerre."

CHAPTER IX

COSNE AND BRIARE

FROM the station of Tracy-Sancerre the railway follows the river closely as far as Cosne, a distance of five and a half miles, and from the carriage windows one looks across at the long Île de Bannay (which at the *étiage* is barely an island at all) and beyond it, at the green woods of Charnic. It is its greenness which—after the blue-painted restaurant for American automobilists which confronts you outside the station—first strikes you on entering Cosne. Never was there a more agreable little town, nor one more sweetly lacking in “objects of interest.” Imagine a congeries of straight roads, of white, respectable houses, of prim streets, all made shady and verdant by even rows of trees on either side ; with a market-place in the middle of it, and the broad, smiling, brown river for one of its boundaries, and you have Cosne. There are two inns, the Grand-Cerf, where Pope Pius VII stayed when Napoleon ordered him to come to France, and the Étoile ; at one of them, I think the latter, I was provided with a luncheon that was in its way as perfect as a poem by Théophile Gautier. It was lyrical, inspired, and with the exception of a Hebrew bagman in a far corner, who limited himself to dry toast and Vichy water, I had

it to myself. That luncheon has perhaps enveloped Cosne for me in a golden, dreamy haze ; fond memory loves to linger there. I spent a gentle afternoon under the luxuriant chestnut trees on the quay, watching the island-studded river and listening to the washerwomen beating and thudding on their boards. I can see now the bluish soapsuds pouring off those boards into the stream to poison the fishes, and the women's great muscles brought hard by the act of wringing the clothes. At Cosne the river gives its first hint of that placidity which masks its turbulence through the Orléanais and Touraine. There are here no expanses of uncovered bed ; the green, tree-shaded Ile de Cosne takes the place of bare sand-banks, and enables the narrow, wobbling suspension bridge to recover its equilibrium before the mainland is finally gained. The bridge leads across to a long, straight, shady avenue, flanked by delightful woods that stretch down to the low river-bed. These woods, however, are " Terrains Militaires," and you are forbidden to explore. The notice was a reminder of the important part played by the Loire, and by the Armée de la Loire—last hope of France—in the Franco-Prussian War. Cosne has still a permanent garrison consisting of a regiment of infantry numbering about 1400 men.

There are many parts of Cosne that have a quiet prettiness and charm, especially where the little river Nohain winds its gentle course through the town, overhung by tall trees, banked by trim, green lawns or little gardens bright with flowers, and spied on by a hundred shy windows of back bedrooms. The stream comes down from the Donziois and supplies—in less

romantic moments—power for the factories which have succeeded the forges of which Mme. de Sévigné has left us a picture in her “Letters.” These forges existed up till 1870, and made many of the anchors for the navy,



Street in Cosne

but they disappeared when the French Admiralty centralised its manufacture of chains and anchors at Guérigny. A great iron foundry has also vanished, but metal-working is still an important industry at Cosne, and a number of workpeople are employed in the

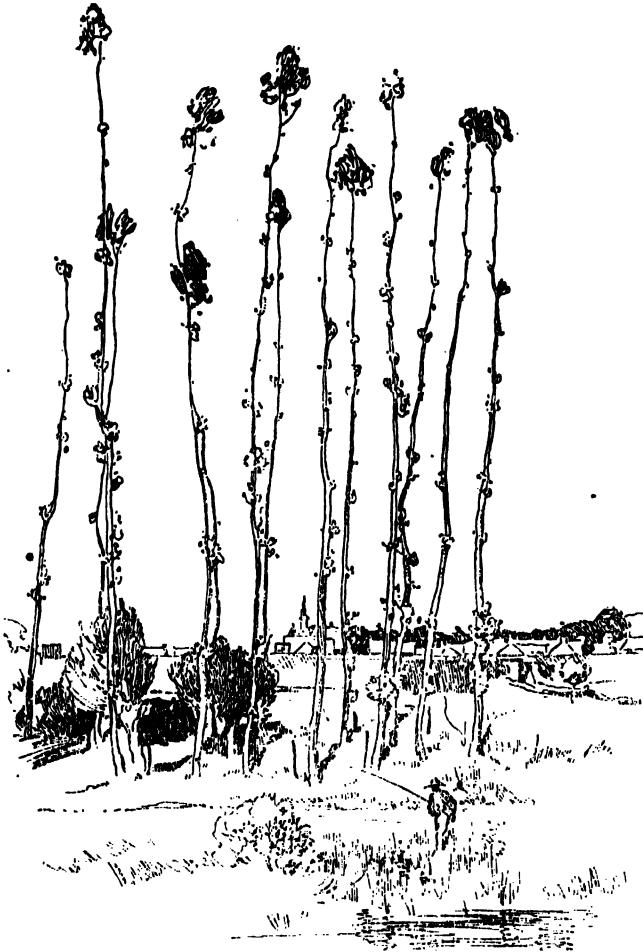
manufacture of files and nails. No one would suspect from a short visit that Cosne boasted any industries at all, the workshops are so well-concealed, the shady central streets of the town so placid. It has not at all the air of a manufacturing place ; nothing could be more rural than its market, with the garrulous, red-faced peasant women in white caps sitting under their umbrellas beside their piles of vegetables. I remember well the impression of peacefulness and comfort conveyed by the sight of a great wagon loaded with hay on the top of which a little soldier, very much undressed, lay fast asleep.

And Cosne is linked for ever in my mind with Alponne—king of men. The tent of Alponne was being erected at the bottom of the market-place on an open space of ground near where the road crosses the Nohain by a low bridge ; and pictures of him were placarded all over the town. Outside the tent a lady in salmon-coloured tights, a slightly tarnished doublet of golden satin, and a white powdered wig, beat continuously upon a drum. That tent seemed to exhale an atmosphere of suppressed excitement ; it stood for wonder and romance, suggested the glamour of enormous courage and of those deeds with biceps and forearm after which sedentary gentlemen dressed in black frock-coats so often yearn in secret. On the posters, stuck with republican insouciance on the walls of churches and other public institutions, were vivid scenes from the life of “ L’Homme Hercule,” showing him engaged in one or other of his labours. Here is Alponne—black, waxed moustaches unruffled—looking blandly on while men smash rocks upon his stomach ; and here again he balances a huge cannon on

his shoulder while an assistant fires it with a flaming poker ; finally he is shown in a performance of which the true Hercules might well have been proud, he drags together two great cart-horses that are being driven energetically in opposite directions. When I think that it was at Cosne that I came in contact with this marvellous man, the place, naturally enough, acquires an added charm. But all my memories of Cosne are delightful. First comes that luncheon at the Hôtel de l'Etoile ; then the white linen drying under the chestnut trees by the river ; the long, frail bridge that two soldiers could break up in five minutes, and the florid statue in the market-place, erected to the Glory of the Republic ; and, finally, the tree-shaded streets ! How delightful, always, are those towns that have in them " nothing that need delay " the tourist.

Below Cosne, the next little town is Myennes, a smoky place chiefly consisting of brick-fields, whose houses stand back from the highway. It is within the confines of La Puisaye, a district as distinct in its way as the Velay or the Morvan—country of clays and potters. At Myennes only bricks and tiles are made, but in the north and west of La Puisaye the making of pottery is the principal industry. Neuvy-sur-Loire, eight miles below Cosne, is a recognised centre for the whole industry. Here the pottery manufactured in the other towns and villages is brought and warehoused. The town is situated at the point where the little river Vrille joins the Loire. All along by the banks of the Loire at Neuvy is a long line of yards in which the pottery from the whole of the district is stored. This pottery is sold to dealers or hawkers who own the long,

narrow boats peculiar to the province of Berry, which are called Montluçons. The dealer, when he has filled



Neuvy

his boat with goods, sets off on the Loire or on the canals, stopping at all the ports to sell his wares. When

the boat is empty, he brings it back to Neuvy to load up a fresh cargo.

There is a very fine view of the Loire valley, to the right, at Neuvy ; and in the pastures of the surrounding districts are to be seen a famous breed of white cattle peculiar to the Nivernais. From below Neuvy both banks of the Loire are studded with ancient fortified towns, very few of which contain now any trace of a warlike past. Many are now mere villages without any sign of bygone importance ; and the old houses made of timber and mud that once filled them have disappeared as a result of sieges, fires, or simple old age, to be replaced by more solid but characterless structures. You would hardly think, for instance, passing through the town of Bonny-sur-Loire, that it had its place in the great epic of the "Maid of Orléans." Behind its ramparts the English garrison thought itself secure, but the Maid led the assault and the place fell. No doubt the Maid gave thanks after her victory in the lovely twelfth-century church dominated by a beautiful tower, whose great size is one of the few things left at Bonny which seem to indicate its early glories. The manufacture of pottery is carried on here, as at most other places in the Puisaye. Almost opposite Bonny, on the other side of the river, here crossed by a suspension bridge, stands on a hill the once fortified town of Beaulieu. The outline of the fortifications is easily traceable, for a grassy track surrounds the town, where once was the old moat or fosse that encircled it, outside the ramparts. Nothing now remains, after the Religious and other wars, of the original city ; and the country-side is not particularly attractive. The château of Courcelles-

le-Roi, between Beaulieu and Châtillon, is of interest chiefly because of two persons celebrated in French history who at different epochs owned it : Agnes Sorcl (1409-50), the famous " Dame de Beauté " who exercised so great an influence over Charles VII and constantly urged him on against the English ; and Marshal Macdonald, born at Sancerre in 1765, who covered himself with glory at Wagram in 1809, was made Duc de Tarente by Napoleon and died at Courcelles in 1840.

Châtillon, the next town, also on the left bank of the river, and once an important stronghold, has a more old-world appearance than its neighbours, but has nowadays nothing warlike about it, except perhaps its site. The older part stands on a kind of spur of hill, rising from between two valleys, and is still made beautiful by a number of old timber houses with pointed roofs. Not so very long ago there were the ruins of towers and ramparts and an ancient keep, but these have disappeared. In the lower town there are some interesting old houses ; and a Nonconformist " temple " recalls the fact that the whole of this district was at one time given up to dissent. I saw no trace at Châtillon of that naughtiness which made Stevenson abuse it so roundly ; but then I was not cast into a dungeon. Lovers of R. L. S. will remember how evilly he was entreated by the Commissary at Châtillon, during his " Inland voyage " with Sir William Simpson. The " Arethusa," on his own showing, always looked a tramp, a person whom the police invariably suspected on insufficient grounds. At Châtillon he was arrested and cast into prison for having no papers. In despair he

insisted that the "Cigarette," who I fancy was approaching Châtillon by a different route, should be arrested too. Nothing simpler. "At the town entry the gendarme culled him like a wayside flower ; and a moment later, two persons, in a high state of surprise,



Châtillon

were confronted in the Commissary's office." The "Cigarette" was "a man of an unquestionable and unassailable manner, in apple-pie order, dressed, not with neatness merely, but elegance, ready with his passport at a word, and well supplied with money : a man the Commissary would have doffed his hat to on chance upon the highway." This respectable indi-

vidual "unblushingly claimed the Arethusa for his comrade" and, as Stevenson's admirers gratefully recall, secured his release from the damp and uncomfortable cell and caused the Commissary to tear up his charge-sheet, "that feast of humour, the unfinished *procès-verbal*." But the worst part of the adventure was still to follow. It was later on, in the café, where after dinner they repaired with a gentleman of the neighbourhood, that the final and most horrible scene took place. "The café was crowded with sportsmen conclamantly explaining to each other and the world the smallness of their bags. About the centre of the room, the Cigarette and the Arethusa sat with their new acquaintance; a trio very well-pleased, for the travellers (after their late experience) were greedy of consideration, and their sportsman rejoiced in a pair of patient listeners. Suddenly the glass door flew open with a crash; the *Maréchal des logis* appeared in the interval, gorgeously belted and befrogged, entered without salutation, strode up the room with a clang of spurs and weapons, and disappeared through a door at the far end. Close at his heels followed the Arethusa's gendarme of the afternoon, imitating, with a nice shade of difference, the imperial bearing of his chief; only, as he passed, he struck lightly with his open hand on the shoulder of his late captive, and with that ringing, dramatic utterance of which he had the secret—'Suivez !' said he."

The beer of that café—supposing that I visited the same one—was, I remember, of an unparalleled badness.

Until the beginning of this century, the Loire at Châtillon was the scene of considerable activity. The

canal from Briare (the Canal du Loing, joining the Loire and the Seine) entered the Loire just opposite the town, and the barges used to cross the river to the entrance of the lateral canal by the aid of a steam tug. Even this limited navigation was constantly being interfered with and impeded either by the floods or by the lowness of the water, so that to avoid the inconvenience, the lateral canal was continued along the left bank by a branch which is carried across the river to Briare by a magnificent *pont-canal*, the finest of its kind in France. This was opened in 1904, and its construction, carried out at the same time as the transformation of the Canal du Loing, has provided the centre of France as far as Roanne with a water-way of the first order, which, according to one authority, “deviendra un merveilleux outil économique quand la Loire sera rendue de nouveau navigable de Briare à l’embouchure.”

Briare is a thriving little town of more than five thousand inhabitants, devoted almost entirely to the singular occupation of making a kind of imitation porcelain button. This industry, to which the place owes its prosperity, was introduced by a M. Bapterosses (“commemorated by a bust” in the Grande Place), an inventor and organiser of genius, whose vast business is still carried on by his descendants.

Below Briare the valley grows still wider, and the river is separated from the hills by strips of alluvial ground consisting of cultivated fields, pasture lands, and osier-beds. There is no considerable village on the right bank between Briare and Gien, but several country houses; one of these, on the outskirts of Briare, crowns the slopes on which the Bapterosses family has estab-

lished a wonderful model vineyard. On the left bank, just before the village of Saint-Brisson, stands a large and ancient château on the side of a hill—an hexagonal grey mass flanked by six high towers—which is the home of the illustrious parliamentary family of Séguier.

CHAPTER X

GIEN

THERE is nothing whatever about the station at Gien to encourage the traveller from Briare to alight, unless it be the station-master's warning to those voyagers who wish to desert the P.L.M. railway for the line of Paris-Orléans. There is a branch line from Gien to Orléans which connects these two great systems ; it lends a spurious animation to the station, which has a settled melancholy from its position in the middle of a bare plain, a mile and a quarter from the town. There is an omnibus which takes the traveller down the dusty and unpleasant highway to the hotel, the Hôtel de l'Écu, for forty centimes, and on the way you pass, at the entrance of the town, a colossal statue of Vercingetorix—reminder that Gien was the Roman Genabum.

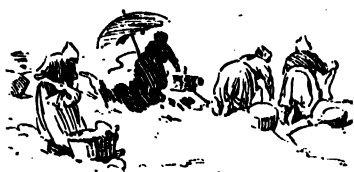
Gien had been the place on which my thoughts for some weeks past had been centred. It was a stage in my journey. Here I was to receive my letters of credit and to pick up again those dry-as-dust threads that bind every man to his daily bread. At Gien I was to hear from such and such people ; to reply to them ; to make decisions affecting my return ; to pause and take breath. In one way or another Gien had been

constantly in my thoughts : I had great hopes of Gien. Baedeker's cryptic utterance I can quote from memory, I read it so often : " A town with 8270 inhab., situated on the right bank of the Loire, 1½ m. to the S. of the station, possesses an important faïence manufactory. The town is commanded by a fine château (now the Palais de Justice), dating from 1494, beside which is a church in the classic style, with a Gothic tower. The stained-glass windows of the church and the curious modern stations of the Cross in the interior may be mentioned." There are few passages in this most admirably restrained of authors which are more entirely non-committal. Gien came as a complete surprise. When I realised that the town was shut in on all sides by a flat expanse of cornfields and vineyards, intersected by highways ruled with geometrical precision, I knew at once that I should never have the patience to get away from it by walking.

The inn was a large square house built of stone, newly fitted up, and filled with *commis-voyageurs*. Just opposite my room, across the narrow street, was an old stone house with a beautifully carved façade and high dormer windows, occupied by a chemist.

Alas ! with terrible celerity I explored Gien. I walked on that first afternoon through all its winding, crooked old streets (in most of which are fifteenth-century houses with charming carved woodwork and curious gables to delight the eye). I stood in the middle of the beautiful stone bridge of twelve arches which dates from the end of the sixteenth century, and admired the way the old town clustered round the base of the château which Anne of Beaujeu recon-

structed, and the joyous way it seemed to break into a wide smile along the river-bank. Unlike most Loire



Gien

towns, Gien does not turn its back on the river, but faces it and crowds down to it as eagerly as Brighton !

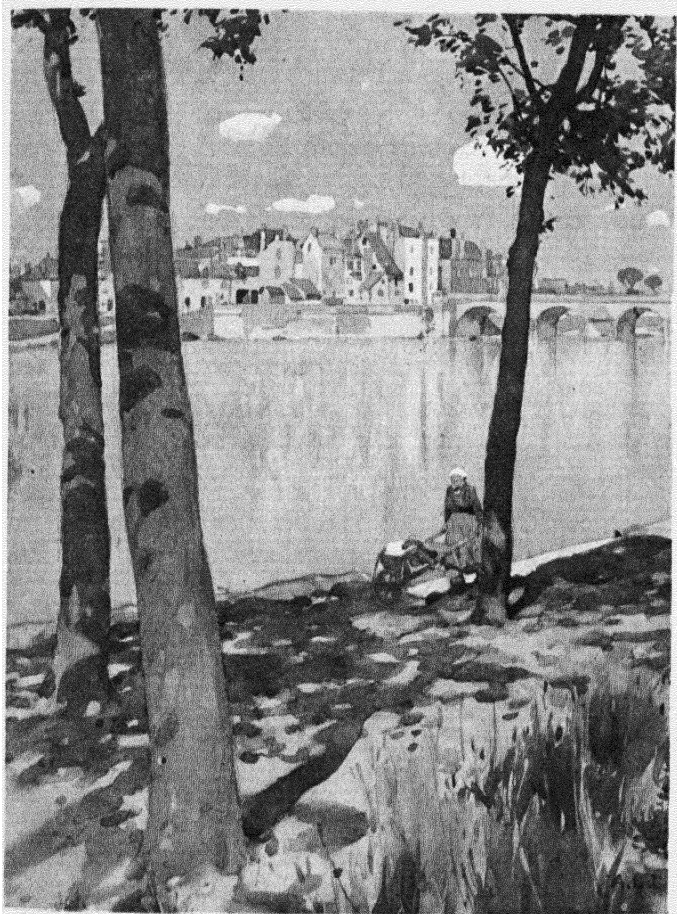
faces and crowds to the sea. A long line of pretty houses looks across to the faubourg of Berri; shady rows of plane trees run the length of the quay and mirror themselves in the swift yet placid stream. The washerwomen's boats, like seedy college barges, are moored at the base of the steep stone embankment, which, high though it is, is insufficient to hold in the waters of the river during the floods. On the bridge, on the walls of the houses facing the Loire, and on the wall of the little seventeenth-century church of Saint Louis that backs on to it, lines are painted or notches cut, each marked with a date—"Crue de 1856"; "Crue de 1864"—grim reminders of the sleeping enemy's power.

Several times before the sacred hour of dinner, I climbed the steep knoll on which the fantastic, turreted château is situated, with the parish church of St. Pierre by its side. The château is indeed a jewel, built of mellowed bricks of reddish purple arranged in elaborate geometrical patterns alternating with carved stone. With its steep roofs, gables, and turrets twisting up to a slim blue point, the outlines of the building are fairy-like, Eastern almost; especially at night, when they are all marked out and accentuated by the light of the moon. In front of the church adjoining is a little plateau of rich green grass, set pleasantly with seats and all shut in by a thick circle of dark towering magnificent trees—at midday the coolest, greenest place imaginable. I saw little in the plain stucco nave ending in a rounded apse to merit the adjective "classical." Beyond a cheap nastiness it has no character at all. The outside walls are stained

with damp where the dense trees have kept off the sun ; even the defiant republican motto, "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité," painted upon them is becoming rapidly illegible. Inside was a forest of tawdry blue-and-white banners, interspersed with the tricolor, which still remained up in honour of St. Jeanne d'Arc, whose festival had been celebrated some weeks before. "Si vous voulez un miracle—Mencz-moi à Orléans," was the legend on quite a dozen banners, embroidered in white on a blue ground. Silvered statues of the Maid in full armour gleamed from every unoccupied corner of the church, whose atmosphere was in a state of symbolic warfare—the smell of stale humanity fighting with the smell of stale incense. The beautiful Gothic tower of this church, which tapers to a pointed roof of slate, is luckily all of it that the trees allow to appear from any distance away.

 Gien certainly compresses its attractions into a narrow compass ; while, as I have said, its surroundings simply defy exploration. It is emphatically a place to spend an hour in, two hours, and then pass on. I realised this very soon ; and my exploration over, I decided to collect my letters from the post office and pass on to Sully or Châteauneuf that very night. The post office at Gien is new, and in the "imposing" style beloved of the French Government building. It is of gleaming white stone, and to get in you have to put your shoulder against the heavy door and push with all your might against the self-closing apparatus. I squeezed in and presented myself before a very official young woman in a black overall with marvellous cuff-protectors. She had a face that can

only be described as bleak. I presented my card and an addressed envelope and made my request for my letters, doubtless with some assurance, for I concluded they must have waited for at least a week. She swung the revolving pigeon-hole languidly round and made a cursory examination among the G's, and yes, I think I detected a faint gleam of malice in the fish-like eye behind the gold-rimmed pince-nez as she remarked impassively: "Il n'y a rien!" I should have much enjoyed tearing down the wire cage that protected her and giving that young woman a severe shaking; instead, I sought a Pernod in the moth-bitten "Grand Café du Loiret"—most comfortless and dismal of its kind. So I should have to spend the night in the place, after all! I may as well state at once that—unhappy prisoner awaiting ransom at the Hôtel de l'Ecu—I spent a week in Gien. The town huddles low and airless by the river, and this was the hottest week in the whole of an exceptionally hot year. How I bore it I do not know. Long before the arrival of the registered letter which brought me my release, I felt like the oldest inhabitant. *Commis-voyageurs* by the dozen came and went. One day a party of English people arrived in a touring car, and dined and slept the night in the hotel. How many weeks was it since I had heard an English voice, or seen an English face! I found myself sending coy glances in their direction during dinner, but not liking (I suppose) my face, they did not wish me so much as a good evening or good morning. Our national obliviousness of others—carefully cultivated and jealously guarded—hardly showed itself to me then, poor prisoner at Gien, in its most



THE BRIDGE, GIEN.

attractive light. The bagman, M. Raimond, who was my neighbour at dinner that evening, could not understand at all why we did not immediately fraternise, regarded me with some suspicion indeed, and related numerous stories of cordial rencounters between Frenchmen in foreign parts. Possibly out of compassion for my now obvious melancholy, he took me for a walk after dinner, the good M. Raimond. While the rich greens and the soft rosy tints of sunset lingered in the sky we sat on the stone parapet above the river close to the bridge. The fronts of the houses on the opposite bank were become dark and their details indistinguishable, though the roofs and chimneys were strongly outlined against the evening sky. One house alone, tall and white, next to the corner house, on the high road just over the bridge, gleamed out clearly from among the others, distinct in every detail. "You see that white house," said my companion. "It is riddled with Prussian bullets. The whole of a night they kept up the firing." His eye flashed, he put up an imaginary rifle to his shoulder, took cover behind the parapet, and fired shot after shot. "Ah, we could crush them now!" he muttered through clenched teeth. "They are afraid of us." M. Raimond presented himself suddenly in a new light; here was a man among men, a bagman with a soul above the carded wool and knitting-needles in which he "travelled." The apex of the bridge, I had noticed, did not seem to be in the middle, a fact which spoilt its symmetry when viewed from the quay. That also, I learned, was a result of the Prussian invasion. The bridge had been blown up in 1870, and patched together thus roughly.

We became intimate, M. Raimond and I, with a swiftness a little dizzying. He showed me a photograph of his wife and daughter who resided at Bourges ; explaining meanwhile that he could not for their sakes contemplate certain dissipations that I, indeed, was far from suggesting. He proceeded to further confidences. He had been born at Gien, but had not been in his native place for twenty-six years. He would show me, he said, the house where he was born. We set off down the long street that runs parallel with the river to the far end of the town, nearly as far as the large faïence factory that is its one industry. It is quite a different place, the Gien of the end near the factory. from the old town nestling round the château ; dirtier and more vital. We stopped in front of a small baker's shop, which M. Raimond indicated with pardonable pride.

"It was in this little house that I first saw the light," he remarked, with a depth of emotion concentrated in the simple sentence. I took off my hat ; it seemed the natural thing to do. Then we went in, invited down a narrow passage to the back room by the baker, of ample proportions, whose bulging red neck perspired over a collarless shirt. Inside the room, which was plainly furnished with a deal table and "kitchen" chairs, and adorned with a few coloured almanacks on the walls, sat the baker's wife, several obvious aunts, and various kinds of children of both sexes. Space was made for us round the table ; we shook hands a great deal and complimented one another about everything that occurred to us. There were two wicked urchins of about twelve and fourteen years old, dressed in long black

overalls caught in at the waist with a leather belt, and a little girl, hated by her mother, who was disfigured by some skin disease. The aunts, who were very fat, seemed to bulge blackly over the table ; they breathed stertorously, and had unfathomable memories for relationships. After M. Raimond had displayed the photographs of his wife and daughter, the baker begged us to " take something " : a drop of comfort.

" Alas ! but not for me," said the fattest aunt, with one little beady eye on the gin bottle ; " I suffer so much with my stomach." A roaring sound came at slow intervals from the deepest abysses of the baker's vast frame as he reached down a bottle labelled " Marc " and passed round the *petits verres*. The suffering aunt he helped first and most liberally, roaring all the time within himself. Charlot and Auguste had theirs diluted, and mitigated by a lump of sugar. With the usual contempt of the Englishman for the potency of foreign drinks, I drank mine neat, with the others. I drank and wept. I do not know of what " Marc " is manufactured—it is white, like gin, and appeared to be a sort of bastard brandy—but I trust that I may never encounter it again. The back of my gullet smarts now at the mere memory.

Leaving the baker and his children and his women-folk grouped round their " Marc," their perspiring faces lit fitfully by the light of a candle stuck in a green glass bottle that stood in the middle of the table, M. Raimond and I made the party the most cordial adieux, and went out into the summer night to continue our pilgrimage. I was shocked to see that M. Raimond's equilibrium was not perfect. He was in the mood,

evidently, to "make a night of it," and led me into the café of a little inn, the Hôtel du Puy-de-Dôme in the rue Thiers, kept by one Henric-Bradou. The inside was perfectly bare and perfectly clean. In one corner two blue-bloused peasants sat dozing in front of their cider pots; at the other end of the room, with a clean deal trestle table in front of them, sat Madame Henric-Bradou, elegant and amiable, her spouse, and a pleasant journalist from Orléans who was staying in the house. The *patron* was in his shirt-sleeves, an ugly yet attractive man with a yellow wrinkled face, keen grey eyes, and iron-grey hair. He was getting fat, but his arms under the sleeves of his dirty shirt looked muscular, and he had the shoulders of a giant. He drank in a way rare among Frenchmen, enormously yet without being at all affected. Both he and his wife and the French journalist were admirable talkers, delightful to listen to, going lightly from subject to subject, never tedious nor dull. The conversation became most serious when the Loire was mentioned. The Loire drowns too many children and grown people every year, the *patron* told me, for the townsfolk of Gien to take it lightly.

"I was a great swimmer when I was young," he continued, "and I know. I tell you the Loire is a traitor. It is like a woman, capricious. Its sand-banks move and change perpetually; one day, in a certain spot, the sand is firm and hard and will bear your weight, the next day if you trust yourself on the very same spot you will go in up to your neck. And in many places there are *tourbillons*—under the bridge, for instance. These drag the strongest swimmer down

like a log and carry him under water sometimes for fifty metres. I tell you the Loire is a traitor. As for what it does in the winter, it is terrific. You have seen the marks of the *crues* on the walls of the houses, down on the Quai!" He illustrated his account of the river's iniquities with harrowing stories of drowned children, of the desperate but unavailing struggles of



A street in Gien

strong swimmers. But I could see he was proud of this monster at the doorstep; loved it even for its villainies. Before I went, Madame Henric-Bradou showed me her bedrooms, and very clean and comfortable they were; inexpensive too; and as for her cookery, was she not renowned for it? If you must stay at Gien at all, and value solid comfort more than appearances, you could

not, I am sure, do better than put up at the Hôtel du Puy-de-Dôme.

As I was preparing to go the talk turned suddenly to wines. Warming to his subject, the *patron* described to me the extraordinary excellence of Pouilly, a white wine of the Loire made from the grapes grown near the little town above Sancerre that I remembered so well. He had some of great age, he told me, in his cellar; he had in Paris paid fifteen francs for the very same wine. A bottle was not to be resisted, and over it our friendship was cemented. Its price was exactly a franc and a half, and its golden luxuriance, its smoothness and delicacy, baffle attempts at description. The charm of a good wine, like the charm of good poetry, does it not lie in the fact that it is indefinable? It was almost the only good thing, that unforgettable bottle of Pouilly, that Gien had to offer as a peace-offering after keeping me prisoner for a week, and it was a tragedy that I only made the acquaintance of the Hôtel du Puy-de-Dôme on the night before my departure. The next morning the relieving letter arrived, and I set off by the first available train. My last memory of Gien is of a dog-cart race down the long highway from the station to the town. Two of these little carts, one a baker's, driven by a stout woman who seemed at least twice as wide as the seat she sat on, the other a milkman's with two little boys in charge, set off down the hill at a furious pace, the old woman nearly suffocated with laughter. The carts were drawn by big dogs with open mouths and slavering tongues—a breed very common in Gien and throughout Beauce, Sologne, and the Orléanais—and swayed giddily as they turned the corner and vanished out of my sight.

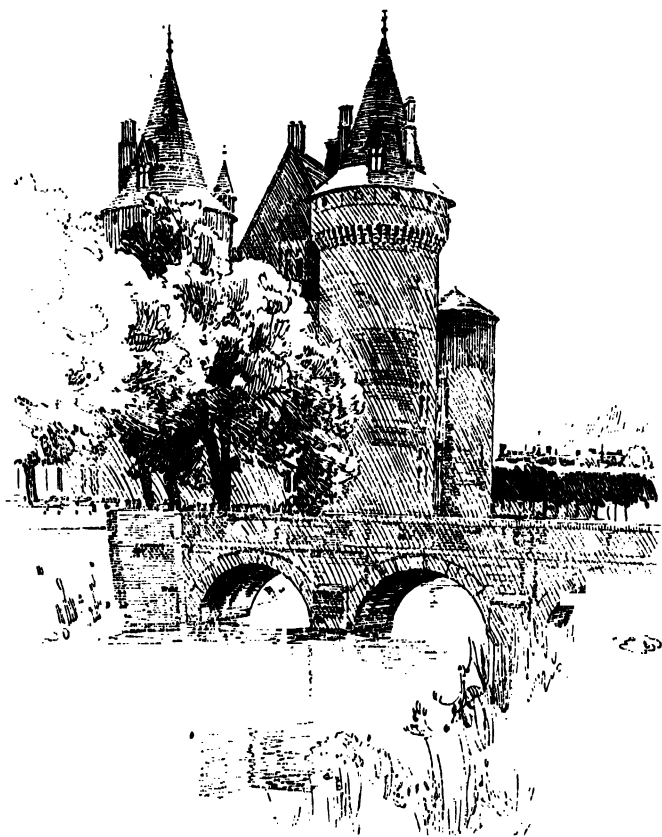
CHAPTER XI

FROM GIEN TO ORLÉANS

WITHIN the triangle made by the three towns of Gién, Argent, and Sully, lie some of the barest and most dismal expanses of a bare and dismal region—Sologne. The Loire winds through the top of the triangle, and the best way to get from Gién to Sully is by canoe, if you have one with you. Sully is a pleasant town, with not quite three thousand inhabitants, on the left bank of the Loire, facing Saint-Père, a village surrounded by luxuriant market-gardens. It preserves, still, many old houses in its narrow streets, but its interest centres chiefly in the magnificent château erected by Henri IV's minister, the great Sully, in 1602. Here he retired after the King's assassination and spent the last years of his life. The castle is right down by the Loire, set in the midst of an artificial lake whose waters are borrowed from the river. It is flanked by four great feudal towers, and the building still retains an appearance of considerable splendour. In one of the courts is a statue of Sully. It was at this castle that Sully wrote his "*Economies Royales*." He had it printed in one of the towers, which was transformed for the purpose into a printing works. The château is a "monument historique"; it is more worth visiting than many of the Loire châteaux that enjoy a far greater celebrity.

There are several places of interest near this town which are practically inaccessible from anywhere by rail. There is a good cycling road, however, from Sully, through St. Benoît, Germigny-des-Près and Châteauneuf—all places of the greatest interest—to Orléans. St. Benoît-sur-Loire is reached soon after getting clear of Saint-Père, its great church—perhaps the finest Romanesque church in France—looming up impressively in front of you. A round moat, almost the only remains of the old defences of the town, survives in places to indicate the extent of what must have been one of the most populous cities of France in the Middle Ages. There are said to have been twelve or fifteen thousand people living round its famous abbey, which was then one of the most thronged religious centres in the country. Its schools are said to have numbered five thousand pupils. Now, St. Benoît has only about five hundred inhabitants, and the shrunken village has in its turn an appearance of desertion. The monastery, dating from 620, was pillaged and destroyed by the Huguenots under Condé in 1562, and nothing of its past splendour now remains except the church. This vast building seems to gain an added magnificence from its lonely situation, dominating a half-deserted village, an undistinguished country-side, and a broad river, on which the navigation has dwindled almost to nothing. The greater part of the structure was built between 1026 and 1218. It has two sets of transepts, with a square central tower rising between them. The western porch (or narthex) is particularly beautiful. It is two stories high and divided into a nave and aisles of three bays each, with columns whose capitals, richly

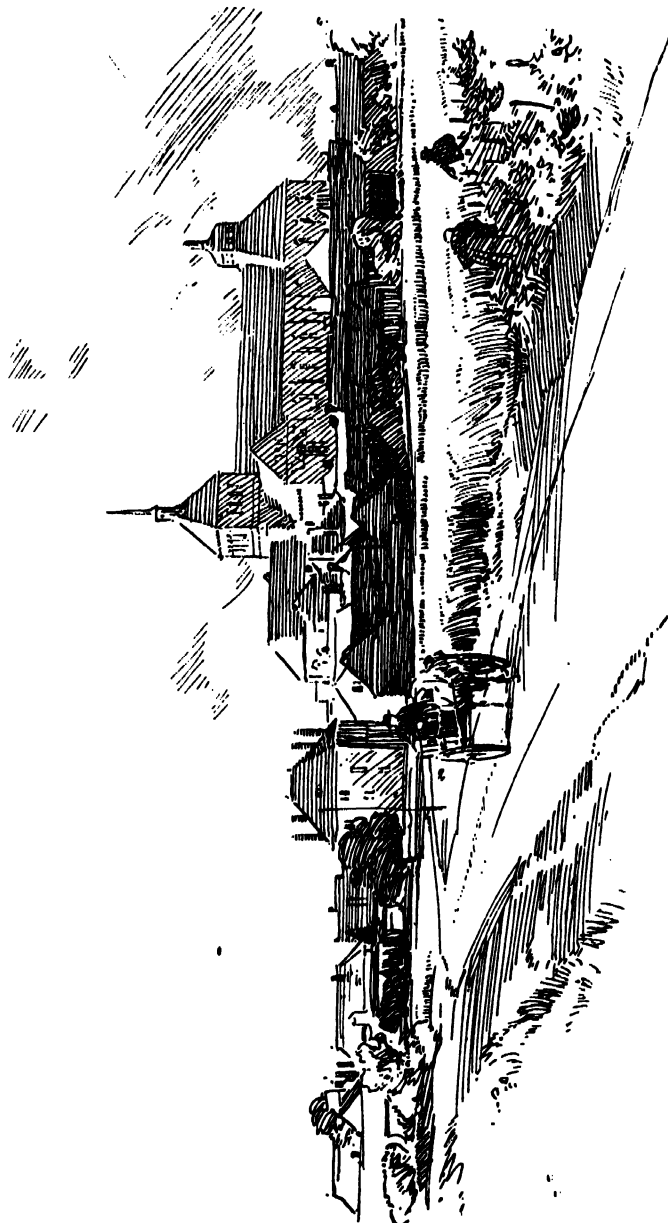
carved, are the most remarkable of their kind and date in France. The subjects, taken from the Apocalypse or from Genesis, are rendered with a great deal of spirit.



The Château of Sully

Umbert, who has inscribed his name on one of the capitals, is perhaps responsible for them all. The story above the aisles containing these columns, consists of a

large hall or chapel. There used to be a further story, over this, which was crenellated and crowned by a spire, but it was destroyed in 1527. The transepts have no doors, but a side entrance, on the north side of the nave, is a fine example of thirteenth-century architecture. Above this door is a representation of the removal of the relics of St. Benoît from Monte Cassino to the monastery. The door is flanked by six great statues, now mutilated. Of these a French authority gives a detailed description: "Six grandes statues horriblement mutilées se dressent en cariatides de chaque côté de la baie, accolées aux colonnes qui soutiennent la voussure; on reconnaît à droite Abraham tenant d'une main la glaive du sacrifice, tandis que l'autre main est posée sur la tête d'Isaac debout devant lui; un ange retient son bras. Vis-à-vis est David avec sa harpe; les autres personnages sont sans attributs . . ." The principal transept is separated by six arcades forming the choir, from the secondary transept. In the first transept, under the central tower, is the tomb of Philippe I (le Bel), who died in 1108—a recumbent statue of the King reposing on four lions. The choir stalls, which date from 1413, are extremely beautiful. Painful excrescences, due to modern bad taste, the church has in plenty—the decorations of the organ for instance—but they are powerless to spoil the general purity of its effect. The sacristy contains several treasures, including some carved woodwork given by Cardinal Richelieu, the Rosary of Anne of Austria, and many valuable reliquaries. A crypt dating from the beginning of the eleventh century extends under the choir and contains the heart of St. Benoît,



St. B.

enclosed in a magnificent modern reliquary in the Romanesque style, the stone tomb of an abbot of the seventh century and a carved wooden altar given by Richelieu.

The church of Germigny-des-Près, a small village of about five hundred inhabitants three miles to the north-west, is hardly less elaborate than the church of St. Benoît, though nowadays far less interesting. For students of architecture and learned pundits it is still, however, a place of pilgrimage ; for imaginative people the lust of French restorers has turned it merely into a public building. The original church was built in 806 by Theodolphus, bishop of Orléans, the friend of Charlemagne and one of the shining lights of the Dark Ages. After an existence of a thousand years, wars, the ravages of the Loire and the deflowering hand of time had brought it to such a condition that a collapse of the structure seemed inevitable. A restoration was decided upon in 1868, a ruthless " restoration " which amounted in reality to a complete rebuilding. With the exception of the mosaics which have made the work of Theodolphus celebrated, and a number of carved finials and old stonework, everything is new. The " soul " is gone out of the building, just as the soul of Tattershall Castle would escape if that venerable tower were to be taken down and re-erected in Salt Lake City. To get an idea of what the original church was like it is necessary to refer to writers who, like Ardouin-Dumazet, can remember it. He makes an interesting comparison between the two buildings, the " restored " and the original : " Le précieux temple était bien plus exigü que l'église actuelle ; c'était un carré ayant une abside

sur chaque face. Dans la reconstruction, un des côtés a disparu pour faire place à une nef qui accroît l'étendue de l'église et lui permet d'abriter la foule des fidèles. Les lignes architecturales sont trop nettes et froides ; ceux qui ont connu la basilique d'autrefois, avec ses incorrections naïves, ne retrouvent plus le charme du vénérable monument. Cependant le plan ancien a été restitué avec tant de scrupule, que l'impression du visiteur reste profonde. En dépit de ceux qui n'estiment un monument que si le temps a mordu sur lui, rongé ses pierres, émoussé ses saillies, l'église de Germigny-des-Près est une merveille."

For myself I must confess a hatred of restorers, which made me leave Germigny without regret, for the little town of Châteauneuf, about three miles farther, along a road almost lined with windmills. Châteauneuf, though a town of only about 3500 inhabitants, is something of a centre for the surrounding country, boasts a not unimportant factory for the production (oddly enough) of those *ponts-transbordeurs* which are to be seen at Marseilles, Rouen, Nantes, and other places, and has besides an industry in the making of the cheeses called locally Olivets. Its vines are numerous, though they have suffered from the phylloxera, and recourse has had to be made to American plants. At Châteauneuf, in the reign of Louis XV, one of the family of Phelypeaux de la Vrillière built a grandiose château, whose ruins still retain an imposing appearance, while the moats and terraces show how spacious the palace must have been. Some kitchens and stables, four small pavilions, and an octagonal rotunda, surmounted by a cupola, are all that actually

remain in the midst of the great park ; but the imaginative eye can do a good deal of reconstruction with the help of these. In the church is a marble statue of great dignity and elegance, but a little pompous and lacking in humour, dedicated to the first of the Phelypeaux, Marquis of La Vrillière, who was a Secretary of State under Louis XIV and died in 1681. The contrast between realism and allegory in the statuary of the tomb is diverting. The minister in the peruke, cloak, and mantle of court dress is invited by an angel to mount towards heaven ; the sentimental expression on his face seems to show either a genuine desire for the wings of a dove, or else merely a polite inability to acquiesce.

After leaving Châteauneuf I made for Jargeau, on the left bank of the river, the next town on my journey to Orléans, reached through the village of St. Denis-de-l'Hôtel, by turning southwards and crossing a long bridge. From the higher part of St. Denis-de-l'Hôtel the traveller is rewarded for his perseverance with a wonderful, awe-inspiring view. There in front is the river with its wide and naked expanses of sand, the suspension bridge, severe in outline, supported on massive round pillars, and the town of Jargeau with its reddish roofs clustering round its church tower. Beyond stretches almost without limit the great plain of the Loire valley, from the midst of which weather-beaten church towers here and there raise their heads. And as far as one can see the valley is studded with windmills, the turning of whose great, sweeping wings seems to give an odd impression of silence to the landscape. As you approach Jargeau, across the suspension bridge,

it seems to nestle and take shelter behind the high wall of a *digue* that rises up sheer from the river's sandy bed.

The view from the bridge up and down the river has a kind of melancholy, half-savage grandeur at low water ; in flood times the scene must be stupendous.

Jargeau's chief claim to celebrity lies in its capture from the English (and the Earl of Suffolk with it) by Jeanne d'Arc on May 22nd, 1429, a few weeks after her miraculous victory at Orléans. She was wounded in the engagement, and a bronze statue commemorating the incident adorns the place du Martroi, to which the traveller is conducted from the bridge on his entry into the town, by the boulevard Jeanne d'Arc. The church, in which no doubt the Maid gave thanks after her victory, dates back, in its oldest parts, to the Romanesque epoch ; successive transformations have greatly disfigured it from the architectural point of view, and the whole building is crushed by the heavy tower.

Jargeau is the centre of an odd but charming industry, namely the making of artificial flowers. About two hundred and fifty women and girls are occupied in it, some of whom come in every morning from Châteauneuf. A flower-maker could hardly help singing at her work and away from it ; and a woman I heard singing on her road, as I left the little town in the late afternoon to make for Orléans, was doubtless one of these immigrants from Châteauneuf, or perhaps a stranger born still farther away : for the song she sang is found more commonly in the department of Indret.

“Voilà ma journée faite,
Je vais me promener, voyez !
Dans mon chemin remontre
Un' jeun' fille à mon gré ;

THE LOIRE

La prends par sa main blanche,
Je la mène à danser.

Quand elle fut dans la danse,
Ell' s'est mise à pleurer.

J'ai ma mère malade
Il faut qu' je vais la soigner.

Quand ell' n' s'ra plus malade
Je reviendrai danser.

Et moi, garçon honnête
Je la laissai aller.

Quand ell' fut dans la plaine,
Ell' s'est mise à chanter.

Tais-toi, petite sotte,
Je saurai t'attraper."

From Jargeau to Orléans is a distance of eleven and a half miles, along a level dusty road. They were not particularly interesting miles, and I was overjoyed when in the clear evening light I saw the twin towers of the cathedral looming high over the plain.

CHAPTER XII

ORLÉANS

AT a first inspection Orléans strikes one as being provincial and dull in an almost English sense. The long new boulevard from the imposing terminus of the Paris-Orléans railway, which cuts through the middle of a broad promenade shaded by giant elms, the boulevard Alexandre Martin, and leads down to the place du Martroi, is bare and glaring. Indeed, in none of the central streets of Orléans, nor in the place du Martroi, is there a single tree. The houses are all in a terribly efficient state of repair, neither old nor new, with even rows of shuttered windows, shiny doors, and sheer, characterless fronts. I don't believe the sun is so merciless in any city in France as it is at Orléans. Round the place du Martroi are a number of cafés (of which the finest is La Rotonde), and outside these cafés sit groups of black-coated men, immobile; each group gazing across the square, at the group opposite. In the middle of the square, by the pretentious bronze statue of the Maid of Orléans on horseback, the white tramcars pass and repass, and a line of *fiacres* wait motionless in the sun for fares that seem never to present themselves. Nothing could be more hopelessly respectable than this place du Martroi; it is so respect-

able that one finds it almost impossible to realise that the blood of Frenchmen was running on this very spot just over forty years ago—well within the memory of all the respectable gentlemen with grey beards who are sitting round it, drinking their café-cognacs and reading the “Petit Parisien.” On October 11th, 1870, the town was captured by the Germans under Von der Tann. On that day “the exulting music of the life-guards resounded through the streets; on the Martroi Square, in front of the Statue of La Pucelle on horse-back, blazed the bivouac-fires of the troops, throwing a flickering light alternately illuminating and again hiding in shadows the houses, that appeared to have been forsaken by their inhabitants.” A month later the town was recaptured by the Armée de la Loire—last hope of the French—but the Germans occupied it a second time on the 5th of December. The horrors of the Franco-German War seem nowadays like an evil dream; there is nothing save the broken bridges of the Loire and a sudden fierceness of the eye in apparently peaceful men when the subject is touched on, to recall them—so prosperous, smiling, and powerful has the country once more become.

My first impressions, then, of Orléans were of the most fiery and unmitigated pavements, the most respectable, clean, well-cared-for streets, belonging to the dullest provincial town on the face of the earth. But first impressions—especially of towns—very often need correction. It was a pleasure, for instance, to meet outside the Café de la Rotonde, the amiable journalist whose acquaintance I had made at the Hôtel du Puy-de-Dôme at Gien. He seemed to have an

Oriental disregard for time ; and insisted on putting himself entirely at my disposal for the day, taking me round to half a dozen different newspaper offices. At one of them, the office of the " Progrès du Loiret," I was introduced to a gentleman in a holland coat with a curling black beard, black eyes, and a wax-pale face who smoked innumerable cigarettes—the Editor-in-Chief. Then there was M. Edmond Schneider, most charming of news editors ; and, in another office, a gentleman whose zebra-like knickerbockers, bright brown boots, and unbounded amiability proclaimed him a devotee of sport. The particular kind of sport in which he indulged was canoeing. He was a leading authority on the subject of boating on the Loire, knew every whirlpool and shallow, every dangerous spot, and every safe bathing-place and camping-ground between Orléans and Nantes ; while the courtesy with which he put the result of his experience at the disposition of a complete stranger endeared him at once. Provided as I now was with two or three acquaintances to nod to or drink an *apéritif* with, Orléans seemed in a sense to grow more human.

The celebrations in connection with the Fête de Jeanne d'Arc, which begins every year on May 8th and is one of the most brilliant of its kind in France—it has only twice been interrupted since its inception, viz. during the Wars of Religion of the sixteenth century, and in the days of the Revolution, from 1792 to 1804—had not long been over at the time of my visit. Luckily for me, the great fair that forms part of them, was still in full swing throughout the whole length of the great boulevard Alexandre Martin, under its dark,

double avenue of trees. A race-meeting was held on the first Sunday of my visit, in the race-course on the left bank of the river in the faubourg St. Marceau, and brought together a fashionable crowd that was most interesting to watch. The women were beautifully dressed ; indeed all the women that I noticed in Orléans seemed to be dressed like Parisians. As M. Schneider pointed out to me, not only is Orléans but two hours from Paris, but it remains still the great centre for the old French nobility, the most aristocratic town in France.

In exploring the " sights " of Orléans I wasted the whole of one stifling afternoon, which might more profitably have been passed in bed, drinking an iced *sirop* behind the cool venetian blinds. I started first along the wide, frigid rue Jeanne d'Arc to the cathedral. Surely the western façade of this building is one of the saddest architectural " failures " that were ever perpetrated ! One Gabriel, an architect of Louis XV's reign, was responsible for this bastard Gothic eyesore which has of all things a Moorish touch, in the narrow pointed doorways. Between the two displeasing, three-storied towers you can see the central spire, rebuilt in 1859. The original Gothic church, the third church on the same site, was begun in 1287 by Bishop Gilles de Patay and burnt by the Huguenots in 1567, before it was quite finished. Eleven chapels of the apse and the side walls of the choir, the most interesting parts of the present building, were preserved from the flames. The reconstruction of the church was begun by Henri IV in 1601 and finally completed after M. Gabriel had done his worst, in the blessed year 1829. It is certainly

better inside than out ; and the effect of the tall pillars without capitals and the great transept windows is im-



Orléans

pressive, while some of the glass is good. The pictures and works of art in the cathedral are neither numerous nor valuable. The organ-case is interesting as having

come from the abbey of St. Benoît; while some magnificent rock-crystal lustres hung originally in the huge eighteenth-century mansion of the Phelypeaux, whose ruins I visited at Châteauneuf.

I did not climb either of the two towers, for I could not find an official to open the door for me. Perhaps if I had I should have been rewarded with the same interesting view, modernised in its details, that Young describes in his "Travels." "From the steeple of the cathedral at Orléans," he writes, "the prospect is very fine. The town large, and its suburbs, of single streets, extend near a league. The vast range of country, that spreads on every side, is an unbounded plain, through which the magnificent Loire bends his stately way in sight for fourteen leagues; the whole scattered with rich meadows, vineyards, gardens, and forests. The population must be very great, for, besides the city, which contains near 40,000 people, the number of smaller towns and villages strewed thickly over the plain is such as to render the whole scene animated."

"Animated" the Orléanais may have seemed to Young with his special agricultural interests. For myself I could see little animation or beauty in it, save on the banks of the Loire or its affluents. As M. Robida has well said: "Dans cet Orléanais, préface de la Touraine, ce qui est beau surtout c'est le val de la Loire entre deux files de coteaux, ce couloir au fond duquel, sur un lit sablonneux, parsemé d'îles sans nombre, au bruissement des files de peupliers, coule le fleuve, aujourd'hui lent et tranquille, somnolent parmi bancs de sable et flots broussailleux, et pourtant, si de trop copieuses averses ont arrosé son bassin, bientôt tout différent,

sombre et fougueux, roulant rapidement des eaux troublées. . . . Derrière ces vastes paysages riverains aux lignes nobles et amples, derrière ces coteaux charmants, il y a la Sologne, terre mélancholique, plate et trop mouillée, qui semble à la moindre pluie, avec toutes ses ornières chargées en ruisseaux, émerger à peine d'une déluge."

Close to the cathedral at the northern corner of the place Sainte Croix is the Mairie or Hôtel de Ville, a Renaissance structure of brick and stone, built originally in 1530 for Jacques Groslot, Seigneur de l'Ile, and enlarged and restored in 1850-4. It was formerly a Royal residence; and here in 1560 died Francis II in the arms of his queen, Mary Stuart. Most of the old houses still remaining in Orléans are in a side street called the rue du Tabour, a continuation of the rue des Carmes which joins it to the rue Royale. One of the finest of them, however, which is very seldom visited, is number 41 in the rue du Poirier, a street on the other side of the rue Royale, near the markets. The Musée Jeanne d'Arc is housed in a beautiful fifteenth-century dwelling in the rue du Tabour, known, entirely without justification, as the Maison d'Agnès Sorel; and farther down in the street is the Maison de l'Annonciade, the house in which Jacques Bouchier, treasurer to the Duc d'Orléans, received Jeanne when she raised the siege and finally drove the English out of the town on May 7th and 8th, 1429. The actual room she occupied no longer exists, as it was pulled down and rebuilt in 1580. The story of how the Maid, after visiting Charles VII at Chinon, rode, clad in her white armour, fearlessly, at the head of her little troop, and filled the English with

terror, never grows stale, and one cannot wonder at its enduring hold on the popular imagination. The result nowadays seems to be a teeming crop of bad statues; three centuries ago patriotism displayed itself more naturally in innumerable songs and ballads, of which the following—"recueillie en 1645 à Orléans"—is a good example :

“ À la douce prière
 Dont le roi Dieu pria
 Nous vint jeune bergère,
 Qui pour nous guerroya ;
 Par divine conduite
 Anglais tant fort greva
 Que tous les mit en fuite,
 Et le siège leva.

Chantons donc tous ensemble,
 Et nous réjouissons ;
 C'est du mieux ce me semble
 Que faire nous peussions.
 Bien nous devons louer Dieu,
 Qui nos grands ennemis
 À chassé de ce lieu,
 Et hors de France mis.”

Near the rue du Tabour is another Renaissance house, flanked by two pointed turrets, the Hôtel Cabut, which is usually known, quite wrongly, as the Maison de Diane de Poitiers. It dates from 1540 and contains now the Musée Historique. There are I believe many other individual houses of interest, but on this hot afternoon I did not hunt for them. I ended up my wanderings with a visit to the Musée de Peinture, housed in the rambling *ancien Hôtel de Ville* built between 1449 and 1498, which, though mutilated, is a precious stone building in whose architecture the ogival style is

intimately blended with that of the Renaissance. Its tower, which dates from 1453, contains two bells of about the same period, and a *bourdon* of 1574. The old house, with its dark rooms and curious winding staircases, is far more interesting than the collection of pictures it encloses. This is one of the most mediocre that I have ever come across in France; and the donations from the State have been particularly cruel. Luckily many of the rooms are so dark that you cannot examine their contents very closely. A Fragonard, a Lancret, and some interesting drawings of châteaux on the Loire are the only things in the gallery that I remember with any pleasure.

No; it must be confessed that the "sights" of Orléans do not contrive to stir the imagination; nor does the presence of so many ancient houses detract from the city's prosperous "suburban" air which at first one finds so tedious. The nicest thing about the town is the presence of the Loire, though the river, just in front of the quays, has been carefully partitioned off by breakwaters in a way that destroys its picturesqueness. Still the panorama of the three bridges is remarkably fine, and as incidents in a landscape the cathedral's twin towers look quite passable under the extraordinarily clear sky. From any of the bridges or from the quays of the left bank in the suburb of St. Marceau, Orléans presents an imposing enough appearance. The town "spreads along the right bank of the Loire, bordering the stream with a regular line of quays with large houses, above which can be discerned on the extreme right the high nave of the church of St. Aignan, the high roofs of various buildings situated at the foot of

the cathedral of Sainte-Croix, the square tower of St. Donatien, the ancient municipal belfry surmounting the buildings of the old Maison des Créneaux, formerly the Hôtel de Ville, the tower of St. Paul's Church and Notre Dame de Recouvrance. . . ."

The river must present a very different appearance now from what it did in the time of Joan of Arc when she sailed upstream with her food-bearing fleet of vessels, to the city's relief, or even in the time of so recent a traveller as Young, who specially mentions the navigation. "There are many barges and boats at the quay," he writes, "built upon the river in the Bourbonnois, etc., loaded with wood, brandy, wine and other goods; on arriving at Nantes, the vessels are broken up and sold with the cargo. Great numbers are built with spruce fir. A boat goes from hence to that city, when demanded by six passengers, each paying a *louis d'or*: they lie on shore every night, and reach Nantes in four days and a half." Young adds in the same passage that the "principal street leading to the bridge (rue Royale) is a fine one, all busy and alive, for trade is brisk here." He also admires "the fine acacias scattered about the town." There are few to admire now, in the central parts. A more elaborate picture still, of Orléans, of an Orléans that has almost utterly disappeared, is left by Evelyn, who visited the city on the 20th of April, 1644, after being "set on by rogues" on the way, in the midst of the forest of Orléans, and narrowly escaping with his life. On the night of his arrival he slept at the White Lion and tells a very tall story for so sober and dignified a man: "In the night a cat kitten'd on my bed, and left on it a young

one having six ears, eight leggs, two bodys from the navil downwards, and two tayles. I found it dead, but warm, in the morning when I awaked." With the passage of time the island in the river referred to in the following description of the city has been swept away by the treacherous and changeable stream; the bridge has been replaced, and the "towers" have disappeared. Indeed, I am inclined to think that Evelyn has in some respects confused Orléans with Tours, whose "opposite" suburbs are built on the side of a hill, whereas St. Marceau is flat. "The city," he records, "is well-built of stone, on the side of the Loyre. About the middle of the river is an island, full of walkes and faire trees, with some houses. There is a stately stone bridge, reaching to the opposite suburbs, built likewise on the edge of an hill, from whence is a beautiful prospect. At one end of the bridge are strong toures, and about the middle, on one side, is the Statue of the Virgin Mary or Pieta, with the dead Christ in her lap, as big as the life. At one side of the Crosse kneeles Cha. VII arm'd, and at the other Joan d'Arc, arm'd like a cavalier, with boots and spurrs, her hayre dischevel'd, as the deliveress of the tounne from our countrymen, when they besieg'd it. The figures are all cast in copper, with a pedistall full of inscriptions as well as a faire columnne joyning it, which is adorn'd with fleurs de lys and a crucifix, with two saints proceeding as it were from two branches out of its capital. The inscriptions on the Crosse are in Latine: 'Mors Christi in cruce nos a contagione labis et aeternorum morborum sanavit.' On the pedestal: 'Rex in hoc signo hostes profligavit, et Johan'a Virgo Aureliam obsidio liberavit,' etc."

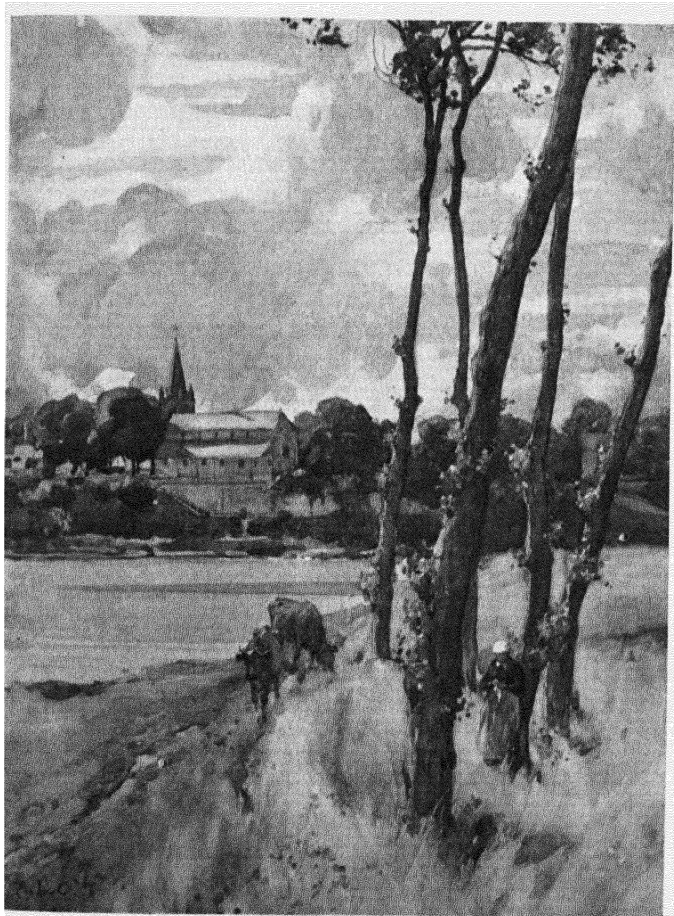
“To this,” he continues, “is made an annual procession on 12 May, Masse being sung before it, attended with great ceremony and concourse of people.” (The fête de Jeanne d’Arc was a well-established festival in Evelyn’s day.) “The wine of this place,” he adds, “is so strong, that the King’s cup-bearers are, as I was assured, sworne never to give the King any of it; but it is a very noble liquor, and much of it transported into other countrys. The town is much frequented by strangers for the greate purity of the language here spoken, as well as for divers other priviledges; and the University makes the towne much frequented by strangers, especially Germans, which causes the English to make no long sojourn here, except such as can drinke and debauch. The Citty stands in the County of Beaulse, was once stiled a kingdom, afterwards a Dutchy, as at present, belonging to the second son of France. Many Councils have been held here, and some Kings crown’d. The University is very antient, divided now by the students into that of four nations, French, High Dutch, Normans and Picardins, who have each their respective protectors, several officers, Treasurers, Consuls, Seales etc. There are in it two reasonable, faire publick Libraries, whence one may borrow a booke to one’s chamber, giving but a note under hand, which is an extraordinary custome, and a confidence that has cost many Libraries deare. The first church I went to visit was St. Croix; it has been a statcly fabric, but has been much ruin’d by the late Civil Warrs. They report the toure of it to have been the highest in France. There is the beginning of a faire reperation. About this cathedrale is a very

spacious cemeterie. The towne-hous is nobly built, with a high tower to it. The market-place and streetes, some whereof are diliciously planted with limes, are ample and strait, are well paved with a kind of pebble, that I have not seen a neater towne in France. This Citty was by Francis I esteemed the most agreeable of his great dominions." So much for Orléans in the seventeenth century; evidently a shadier and pleasanter place than the Orléans of to-day, whose Hausmannised streets are for the most part quite innocent of lime trees.

For some days I could not understand how so big a city could have so little "life." True, there was the big fair with its *Cirque Suisse*, its concerts, cinematograph shows and "Roue joyeuse," its magnificent merry-go-rounds, and its mile of booths; but that was, after all, a temporary thing. They could not, surely, crowd their summer dissipations into the three or four weeks for which it lasted. Certainly the fair was extremely amusing. For the joy of riding on a flying pig, an ostrich or a galloping horse, I would most cheerfully undertake a ten-mile walk. The blare of the steam organ grinding out the popular tune, thrills me to the quick; my heart leaps when I see the metal figure—with his peaked cap, brown beard and little blue jacket—whose clock-work arm waves jerkily up and down his imbecile conductor's baton. I love too the elegant females with swelling bosoms, upturned eyes and bright yellow hair, whose images act as inspirations on either side of him; and I invariably examine the name of the Italian firm responsible for the organ and its adornments, with a kind of rapture. The toot-toot

of the engine announcing that the ostriches are starting another flight is dearer to me than the song of the nightingale. I spend a fortune (or such a part of one as I happen to have available) on "streamers." To encircle a pretty girl's neck with a flying lasso of blue paper and to catch her disappearing smile as the galloping charger swings her quickly round and out of sight, seems to me the most profitable and delightful occupation in the world. To seek oblivion, forgetfulness, the power not to "think" in alcohol, is animal and absurd when there are roundabouts in the offing. I defy anyone to sit glum, morbid and morose while he is being whirled round to the deafening and delirious strains of the steam organ. The merry-go-round is to me the one joy which never palls.

At the fair at Orléans an electrically-illuminated palace was devoted to the cult of the *carrousel*. Its appearance, from the outside, suggested the front entrance of an exhibition. Two enormous arc-lamps illuminated a magnificent triumphal arch of painted canvas; the side walls of the structure, also of canvas, were painted with lovely women floating on cloud-bolsters, in an azure sky. From within came melodious, alluring sounds. A very fat woman with black hair, and a Hebrew nose through which she constantly sniffed, sat at the entrance at the receipt of custom, with a brown knitted shawl over her shoulders. A high desk piled with money rose in front of her, and here the devotees paid their 80 centimes, and were admitted. Inside the tent was a huge and beautiful merry-go-round, a very prince of merry-go-rounds; a thronged promenade encircled it. On the left hand was a small



THE LOIRE NEAR ORLEANS (LA CHAPELLE-ST-MESMIN).

buvette, with green-painted iron chairs and tables; on the right was the counter where "streamers" of every colour in the rainbow were sold in bundles for half a franc. With an experience of merry-go-rounds that extends from the donkey-driven "fit-up" of an Essex village to such varied splendours as those of St. Giles's Fair at Oxford, Paris on the Quatorze Juillet, and the fête de St. Cloud, I have to admit that I had never before seen, nor even imagined a *carrousel* so magnificent. My memories of Orléans centre round it. Sometimes in dreams it comes to me, looming portentous and unearthly. I see a constant procession of masked figures, like the quaint people in Pietro Longhi's scenes from Goldoni's Comedies, passing to and fro round it; leering or laughing, throwing streamers, pointing with emaciated fingers, casting avid glances, feeling for the small concealed dagger or sily, perhaps, sliding an amorous arm round a companion's waist. And in the middle of it all revolves the huge, glittering round-about, with its ostriches and horses, round whose necks cling fantastically clothed men and girls. They seem to leap up, as they come abreast of one, as though about to be hurled from their steeds, and then to sink down as they swirl round and out of sight. And the music from the steam organ, conducted by the grotesque manikin with his inflexible forearm moving up and down and beating the wrong time, seems (in my dream) to be curiously distinct and horrible, and yet remote. Often the sides of the tent shutting in the glittering, monstrous machine and its revolving crowds seem to drop away, and the scene becomes encircled instead by a ring of tall, black trees—

admirable *décor*. A round yellow moon peers cynically over these trees, but the crowd take no notice; the women see nothing but the arc lamps and the looking-glasses, the men nothing but the glow in the women's eyes. Sometimes couples steal away on tip-toe among the shadows, but nobody notices: the huge *carrousel* holds the collective attention of the crowd, with its brilliance, colour, garish noise, excitement and *speed*.

But the symbolism of the merry-go-round and the fun of it, all the fun of the fair, even for a crowded month, were, I knew, insufficient to keep a pleasure-loving French city amused during a whole summer. Where did the people go to enjoy themselves? The yellow tramcars answered the question for me. A person of simple tastes, tramcars, and other public conveyances of an inexpensive character have, like roundabouts, a certain fascination for me. I like to get on to them and continue in my seat until in some strange, unfinished suburb or outlying township, they come abruptly to a standstill. Then I descend and explore. Following this habit I boarded a car in the place du Martroi, crossed over to the left bank of the river, and went as far as the little town of Olivet. This is not a prepossessing place on a first view, but on the way the Loiret is crossed at a beautiful spot where there are many cafés and boating stations and the scene is very animated. I reserved that, however, for the return journey and persevered as far as the terminus. From Olivet it is no more than a two-mile walk to the Château de la Source, in whose beautiful gardens are the two springs from which the Loiret starts, known as the Abîme and the Bouillon. They are said to have

subterranean communication with the Loire, and certainly when the waters of the Loire rise, those of the Loiret follow suit at an interval of from one to two days. No doubt the springs are fed by the waters that the Loire loses in the sand, above Orléans. The Loiret leaps into being at once as a navigable river for ordinary canoes and river craft ; its waters are admirably clear, its banks beautifully wooded and studded with the flower gardens of pretty houses, and green lawns sloping to the water's edge. The Château de la Source is a charming house consisting principally of a long, elegant façade, with a sharp, sloping roof, adorned in the middle with four flattened pillars supporting a triangular-shaped classical pediment. Returning to Olivet I eventually reached the Loiret again, where I had first noticed it. On either side of the stone bridge which bears the tramway from Orléans across the river were cafés and restaurants. At all of these "barquès" could be hired by the hour for a small sum ; "matelotes" and "fritures" were specialities ; and you could sit under green trees by the river-side and drink your coffee or *sirop* while listening to a band. The river, which is rather wider than the upper Cherwell by the Parks at Oxford, and more beautiful, has but a gentle current. It was crowded with boats on the Sunday afternoon on which I first discovered it. A busy motor boat made constant journeys, carrying passengers from the bridge to a café some way down the river, or bringing them back from it. All down one side of the river was a row of cafés, one after another, with curious and alluring names, in whose gardens laughed and perspired crowds of Orléannais, who were obviously enjoying themselves.

Now and then a banjo trilled out across the river, or someone sang a comic song. Here, evidently, the townspeople expanded; dances, concerts, and dissipations of every kind were plainly indulged in at the Prado, or the Eldorado, or in the gardens of La Pepinière. No wonder after their shadeless and broiling streets they enjoyed the coolness of these green meadows and beautifully wooded reaches. Sculling in the brightly painted "barques" that are for hire is not as pleasant as it might be, for those who appreciate the niceties of this art. The clumsy oars hook on to the row-locks so that you cannot feather, and the boats are heavy; but, after all, what does it matter? Why should one wish to arrive anywhere when the mere fact of moving along under the trees is so pleasant?

Having now discovered what Orléans could do in the way of suburbs, I explored still further, adventuring to the château of St. Loup on the banks of the Loire, nearly two miles above the town, and to La Chapelle-St. Mesmin, two and a half miles below. La Chapelle-St. Mesmin is a beautiful old village, terraced above the Loire, a smiling, verdant spot nestling in trees under the edge of that vast, bare plateau, the plain of La Beauce, which surrounds Orléans. Here, again, is a place where one can enjoy oneself. The village stretches in a long line at the top of a steep, grassy embankment above the river, which, at this point, is wide and placid, and free from sand-banks. You may sit under the vines in the garden of the Café de Bellevue and watch the primitive ferry struggling across with its load of pedestrians and cyclists, at the Orléans end of the village; or walk on past the old church and

the sleepy *places* to the beginning of the fairy-like woods of St. Mesmin, full of acacias with delicate bright leaves, through which the sunshine glints. There are several more cafés, on the borders of the wood, where you may dance and sing, drink wine or beer, and embrace Phyllis in the shade of an arbour. One of these, with a flowery garden sloping down to the river's brink, was called prettily "La Closerie des Roses." But the



The Loire near Orléans

woods of St. Mesmin—one could not have believed it of so bare-scenting a country-side. All among the trees, that were not too tall but exquisitely green, grew long luxuriant grass and bracken to make the softest of beds. There was nothing to stop one from wandering at will, and yet few paths or well-worn tracks, only one central road. In some places the wood became darker, the branches thicker, and the trees taller, giving an effect of solemnity; then, the next minute, you would be among a group of acacia

trees whose leaves seemed to make beautiful cascades of bright yellowish green, all tinged with warm gold in the sunlight. And constantly, as you wandered aimless and delighted, you would come out with a cry of joy on the grassy clearing above the river. Then you would see a vast country-side spread out before you, and in the distance the twin towers of Orléans Cathedral; and always the great river, very splendid just here and majestic, winding like a huge snake—blue now, but ready to be flooded with crimson by a dying sun or turned by the risen moon into a glittering roadway of silver. I do not know of any enchanted woods quite like the woods of St. Mesmin below Orléans. They are gentle, unterrifying woods, where you come quite naturally on whole families sitting in the grass in a circle, or lying on their backs—the men in their shirt-sleeves, the women perspiring in their blouses, with their hats off. And you might as soon meet a pleasant nymph or an amiable dryad: witches and all malevolent creatures and spirits would hardly feel at home in it.

I walked back to Orléans as the sun sank in the west, at the close of the beautiful golden day; walked along the high embankment which was studded with a white flower that grew to the very water's edge; and watched the outlines of the landscape growing sharper and more defined, the shadows beginning to lengthen. I saw three men, half-way towards Orléans, throw off their clothes and enter the river; the sun made their arms shine as they lifted them out of the water in the side-stroke. It caught the row of drops that hung for the brief instant, making them sparkle and glitter.

The swimmers were soon borne down the stream by the swift current; and when they had gone as far as they wanted they struck in to the bank and pulled themselves on shore, then raced upstream along the grass while the sun at their backs seemed to shed a golden radiance over their bodies. They were somehow the final touch that the river wanted just here, those bathers. They took away any look that it might have had of savagery, made it a human river.

But in spite of its beautiful suburbs, its unsurpassed merry-go-round, and its aristocratic "society," nothing could really alter the fact that Orléans was a dull place. In ten days I decided I had seen enough of it, and so, one morning—not without some sinking of the heart at having to face the "Châteaux of the Loire," most repellent to me of all well-worn trips—I started out to catch the express for Blois.

CHAPTER XIII

BEAUGENCY

IN telling her charge to "cheer up" after some infantile catastrophe, I remember that my old nurse would remark sagely, and in parenthesis, that after all you never knew what might happen next, for great joys like great sorrows always arrived by accident, unwooded, and when you least expected them. I confess with some shame that it was pure accident that gave me the great joy of discovering Meung and Beaugency. When I left Orléans these names conveyed nothing to me at all ; I decided to settle myself in the express and pass them by. I took my seat in the train, having first bought Artzybachev's "Sanine," which I was curious to read, at the station bookstall. So it was "Sanine," then, that did it ? The train left at the appointed time, and I became absorbed in my book. We stopped at Les Aubrais, the station just outside Orléans, I thought for rather a long time ; then the train went on. Again, after a little while, it stopped a second time. This cannot be Blois already, I thought. I looked out, and the station was strangely familiar : I was back at Orléans ! The *contrôleur* cut short my fierce remarks as to the infamy of not informing all passengers that to catch the express trains to the west

it was necessary to change at Les Aubrais ; he cut me short by indicating another train, a slow one, that was on the point of starting in the direction of Blois. I climbed into it, threw down "Sanine," and settled myself in a corner to study the landscape ; I did not have to change this time. The fertile and flat plain of Beauce did not prove a very thrilling landscape to study, but the smiling village of St. Ay, on a vine-covered hill above the Loire—the country people pronounce it "Sinti," and it is here that much of the wine is grown that is made into vinegar and "Quinquina" at Orléans—was an indication of better things. And Meung and Beaugency were to follow. I left the train at Meung and explored it with surprised joy. It is an old town of about three thousand people, silent, motionless, and grave, asleep amid the greenness of its gardens, and traversed by a brook, the Mauve, which turns its water-wheels. The Loire, crossed here by a suspension bridge, winds in front of the place without a single boat upon its broad surface ; there is not a movement anywhere unless it is perhaps some sand-diggers filling a cart at the bottom of the fields, or the rhythmic cadence of a horse's hoofs on the bridge. On the opposite side, in the sad country of Sologne, the stream is flanked by long lines of alders with shuddering leaves, and the plain is diversified here and there by round clumps of trees.

In mediæval times Meung must have been a town of some importance. It had a large abbey, and was a stronghold which played its part in the wars against the English, and was relieved by Joan of Arc a little while after her delivery of Orléans. Nowadays the curious twelfth-century church of St. Liphard, which is

attached by a curtain-wall to a thirteenth-century fortified tower—the oldest part of the castle of the Bishops of Orléans—is the most interesting of the old buildings



The Porte d'Amont at Meung

which have survived. Besides the church, one of the old town gates, the Porte d'Amont, and some ancient dwelling-houses, are all that remain to remind one of the

past. The church is very curious, and has, inside, a kind of beautiful severity. It is flanked on the west by a great Romanesque tower surmounted by a pyramidal stone spire ; a robust, substantial tower whose gaping arches at the top, before the spire begins, are haunted by circling crows that seem to enhance its effect of antiquity.

The Porte d'Amont is a simple square tower built across the road, finished with a roof sloping steeply to a point, and crowned by a little turret. As the stranger enters the town he can look up at a clock set where the roof begins, and at the saint in his niche just over the arch. As I have said, there is not much of interest in Meung besides the church, the remains of the bishop's castle, this gate, and some buildings near the bridge connected with Louis XI, who is said to have occupied them. But where the restorer's hand has not been too heavy there is always a chance for the imagination. As I walked along the shady promenade above the river I suddenly remembered the rascal Villon who was shut up in 1461 by Thibault d'Aussigny, Bishop of Orléans, in one of the towers of his castle :

“ En un bas lieu, non pas en haut.”

Here it was that he was so fearfully badly fed and composed the first part of his humorous “Grant Testament,” where the laughter is so close to tears.

“ En l'an trentiesme de mon eage,
Que toutes mes hontes j'en beues,
Ne du tout fol, ne du tout sage.
Nonobstant maintes peines eues,
Lesquelles j'ay toutes receues,
Soubz la main Thibault d'Aussigny.
S'evesque il est, seignant les rues,
Qu'il soit le mien je le regny !”

Villon spent "*tout ung esté*" in great discomfort at Meung, but luckily for him Louis XI, who had just succeeded to the throne, passed through the town in the autumn of 1461 and delivered him. Meung has still earlier literary associations, for Jean Clopinel, who continued and completed Guillaume de Lorris's "*Roman de la Rose*," under the name of Jean de Meung, was born here in the thirteenth century. Again, was it not in a tavern of Meung that Alexandre Dumas first introduced us to the "*Trois Mousquetaires*"? With Walter Scott ("*Quentin Durward*"), Chaucer (who translated the "*Roman de la Rose*"), Dumas and Villon to stir one's imagination, Meung, willy-nilly, took on all the colours of romance. The peacefulness, the silence, the clear sparkling air and the golden sunshine of that June morning lent a final touch of charm.

But if I exhaust my adjectives over Meung I shall have nothing left for Beaugency. Beaugency may not have known Villon nor D'Artagnan, nor have been the birth-place of a poet whose name is held in awe, but whose books none but professors can read—yet it is an ancient city full of ancient buildings, whose every stone stirs the imagination: a dead city, a lovely corner in which the flavour of the Middle Ages has been curiously, exquisitely preserved. It is finer than Meung because more complete; it has no factories, or workshops, has suffered little from the restorer and from the modern spirit. It is five miles below Meung on the same side of the river (the right), and not quite fifteen miles from Orléans. The landscape here is wide and open, getting all its character from the great river that traverses it, but is more beautiful and agreeable than

at Orléans. Beaugency with its belfry, its spires, and jumble of old roofs surrounding a great square donjon, is like a fairy town, fantastically grouped and outlined, a jewel in a green setting. On the left bank is a wide expanse that it contemplates with equanimity. This expanse, after a few houses at the head of the bridge, consists of nothing but a stretch of rich meadows traversed by raised embankments called *guidons*, erected after the great floods of 1856 to guide the waters in the direction of the bridge and as far as possible to preserve the fields. Here and there one notices clumps of trees—those in the distance looking like dark green tufts—that crown the few small undulations of the land. The river by Beaugency contains a number of islands—long, verdant strips of soil rising out of the water—yellow sand-banks, and lines of tall reeds and rushes joining islet to islet. Here, where now there is no living thing to be seen save perhaps a few cows munching grass, stood formerly two populous suburbs—Bourgneuf above the town, Beaumont below it—in which important industries were carried on, such as cloth-weaving and candle-making. Both were swept utterly away by the floods of 1598 and 1608. On the left bank, about a mile and a half below the bridge, is a meadow still known as the *Près d'Alonne*, after a Seigneur of the sixteenth century. The legend says that he left the field in his will to the young married couples of Beaugency who should be able to substantiate their claim to having passed the first year of their marriage without the shadow of a dispute or of a regret. No claimants have ever presented themselves, and the meadow still awaits an owner!

The finest view of Beaugency is undoubtedly to be

had from the river, though even from the railway it looks sufficiently exciting to make you leap out of the train with eagerness. If you keep to the right after leaving the station you come almost at once from the Grand Mail to the Petit Mail. The latter is a lovely promenade of tall trees, cool and dark in the hottest sunshine, from the end of which on a clear day the Basilica of Cléry on the opposite bank—where Louis XI lies buried in the splendid fifteenth-century church of Notre Dame—and even the twin towers of Orléans Cathedral, can be discerned. The bells of Notre Dame de Cléry, like those of Beaugency, formerly enjoyed a great celebrity and are commemorated in a nursery rhyme :

“Orléans, Boisgency,
Notre Dame de Cléry,
Vendôme, Vendôme !
Quel chagrin, quel ennui,
De compter toute la nuit,
• Les heures, les heures.”

From the shady promenade of the Petit Mail it is possible to scramble down the steep declivity, by a path, to the river ; or to enter Beaugency by the half-ruined gateway on the left, the Porte-Tavers. Beaugency is full of interesting things ; but all the buildings are dwarfed, at all events in size, by the huge eleventh-century keep, the Tour de César. This is now but a massive shell ; for a timber merchant to whom it was sold after the Revolution, cleared away the mass of earth supporting the central pillar, which, in 1816, gave way, bringing down with it the three floors above and leaving the tower open to the sky. It was bought by the State in 1843, and you are not allowed to go inside. It is improbable that this is a great deprivation :

the exterior of the great fortress makes quite sufficient effect with its crowd of jackdaws cawing and circling round its lichened, crumbling parapets.

Joan of Arc, inevitably, has her place in the history of Beaugency. She besieged an English garrison in this very stronghold and forced them to evacuate it on June 17th, 1429. A statue of her stands in the middle of the place St. Firmin on a spot once occupied by the great



Beaugency

parish church of 'St. Firmin, which was destroyed, with the exception of the belfry tower, in the time of the Revolution. This belfry is a high and beautiful erection surmounted by the oddest little spike—it does not deserve to be called a spire—which can be seen for a radius of many miles round the town.

Close to the Tour de César is the newer château, rebuilt by Dunois, the Bastard of Orléans, in 1440. It was at one time surrounded by a system of walls and

formidable towers stretching from the old donjon to the bridge across the Loire. The courtyard is charming with its open arcading, and charming, too, is the staircase-turret with its round, pointed roof. In the great hall, called the Salle de Jeanne d'Arc, is an enormous fireplace; and under the building are said to stretch very curious cellars. The château is used now as a Dépôt de Mendicité. Near by is the ancient church of the Benedictine Abbey of Notre Dame, a building in the Romanesque style of the eleventh century, which has been several times restored, especially after its partial destruction (by fire) in 1567 when the Huguenots were committing their worst excesses in the town. There is a good deal of curious stone-carving on the two entrance archways and on some of the pillars in the nave. I carried away a very vivid memory of the cynical, grimacing head—full of the vivid expressiveness of a half-barbaric art—on the second pillar on the right-hand side. The church is all that now remains of the old abbey buildings, with the exception of the curious round tower known as the Tour du Diable which flanks the Abbot's house. The latter has been frequently rebuilt and is now a large and not particularly interesting dwelling, facing the river. The Hôtel de Ville is an elaborate Renaissance building, dating from 1526, with a carved façade that has been so utterly restored as to look like an excellent imitation of itself. Inside are some valuable and beautiful tapestries, spoils from the abbey and dating possibly from the sixteenth century, which represent the four quarters of the globe. Among the other buildings of Beaugency which must be referred to in detail are the Tour de l'Horloge, the old

"Porte Vendomoise," which bridges the rue du Change and bears the town clock just under its bell-turret. Near by it is a beautiful twelfth-century house. Turning now up a steep, winding street you come to the broad place du Martroi, paved with cobble-stones, which contains the various cafés; and at the end nearest the station are the town's two inns, the Hôtel de l'Ecu, and the Hôtel St. Etienne. I put up at the latter, which has the disused church of St. Etienne—a small cruciform building of the eleventh century—adjoining its yard.

It has taken nearly as much time to mention the various points of interest as it took to visit them. Beaugency is very compact; everything is close together and close to the river. I did not discover, however, some of the picturesque streets all at once. They hid themselves shyly; indeed, the streets of small French towns often seem to have the trick of secrecy. One of the most delightful that revealed itself subsequently is the narrow rue du Ru, in the lower part of the town, through the midst of which glides the little brook the Ru.

I notice that I have left mention of the most wonderful and fascinating of all the monuments in Beaugency till the end—I mean the bridge. It is the oldest of all the bridges across the Loire and the most famous. Some, at least, of its twenty-six arches are said to date from the eleventh century; the majority date from the fourteenth century. Some are flat, made of cement and iron—these are where the bridge was cut in 1815, and again in 1870, when a frantic but unavailing struggle was waged here by the Armée de la Loire against the Germans, for four or five consecutive days.

Many legends have naturally enough gathered round the bridge, in the chief of which the Devil plays a prominent part. Indeed he is said to have built it himself in a single night.

“Le pont de Beaugency, la huitième merveille,
Est une œuvre du diable, une œuvre sans pareille !
Il l’a fait d’une nuit, et comme tout d’un coup,
Sans qu’on ait des marteaux entendu même un coup ;
Seulement il avait réservé pour lui la plus belle âme
Qui passerait ce pont, jeune, vieux, homme ou femme.
Les gens de Beaugency—l’on peut compter sur eux !
Se tirèrent très bien d’un pas si dangereux :
Ils prirent un matou de force appréciable
Et sur le pont tout neuf le lancèrent : le diable,
Distrain probablement, se saisit du matou
Et rageur l’emporta dans l’enfer, Dieu sait où ?
Pas une âme ne fût, grâce à ce stratagème,
Condamnée à subir les feux du gouffre et même
Grand honneur nous en vint quand plus tard on l’apprit,
Nous passons depuis lors pour avoir de l’esprit.

Ornés de sobriquets consacrés par l’histoire,
Célèbres sont déjà sur les bords de la Loire,
Les Guépins d’Orléans et les Ânes de Meung ;
Nous, nous avons conquis un titre moins commun ;
Doux, fins, griffants parfois, polis pour tout le monde
Jusques au dernier tour de la machine ronde,
En souvenir du Chat qu’un diable prit ici,
Nous serons appelés : *Les Chats de Beaugency*.”

Dinner on the day of my arrival was an affair from which I was glad to escape. We sat round a long table in a very stuffy room : I was next to two young motorists from Paris. At the end of the table on the opposite side was a tiresome Greybeard—alas, a too familiar type not only in France and England, but probably all over the world. He talked at immense length, and his conversation was employed exclusively for the display

of his various qualities: his learning, intelligence, breadth of view, patriotism, importance in his native commune, generosity of character. He talked, I must admit, with an excellent manner—that is a thing which all Frenchmen seem to know how to acquire—but he



Beaugency Bridge

went on! His loud voice drowned the noises of the service and the discreet tinkle of dexterously managed knife and fork; it drowned everything. Then, in an unlucky moment, his eye swept his audience and fell on me. He began to talk of England. He spoke of the independence of the English; of their energy and justice; of their wealth; of the Entente Cordiale; of

his friend Sir Robinson, a leader of the House of Lords ; of the English Constitution and the admirable virtues of le roi Edouard. During this harangue his own and his neighbours' eyes stole constantly in my direction. Clearly I was to join in : the graceful remark was expected of me ; something gracious and dignified, and yet, as became the mouthpiece of a nation, not too familiar. I could see it followed by toasts, for the pompous old idiot had evidently been a Mayor. From the spectacle of a shy Englishman endeavouring to rise to such a social occasion, tactful eyes will instinctively avert their gaze. It is enough to say that the dinner did not last for ever.

Pleasantly exhilarated with the wine I had drunk to enable myself to do justice to my country, I went out into the place du Martroi. The evening was perfect—the western sky was a bright, unearthly green changing to a pink which faded in its turn to grey. Straight above me was a stony blue, not yet the deep blue that it would become later, when the moon rose and the green radiance disappeared. I turned for a moment, for a liqueur of cognac, into the Café de l'Agriculture, a fairly large and quite empty café presided over by a widow with a long yellow nose that curled over at the end like the trunk of an elephant. She had jingling keys knocking at her side and wore a black alpaca apron. Seated on a red plush seat against the wall, on the right-hand side of the door as you went in, were her two daughters. They had frizzy yellow hair ; one sewed a chemise, the other made interminable efforts to play a scale correctly on the mandoline. Of course, if they had not been so ugly they would have been making love under the trees

of the Petit Mail, or on the long silent *quais* by the Loire. On that most amorous of June nights no girl worth her salt could have resisted the entreaty of a lover's arms.

I went down again towards the river, and sat on the stone parapet in the middle of the bridge. Slowly the moon rose, the green and pink glow faded from the sky. Looking over the parapet I could see the water swirling down, under the arches, making *tourbillons*, dangerous for even the strongest swimmer. The moon shone balefully on these miniature whirlpools that made a faint sucking noise, not unlike a deep chuckle—the only murmur that broke the almost unearthly stillness. I noticed that, growing in every crevice of the stone, when I looked over, were flowers and grasses, denuded now of all colour save a lovely pallor, but preserving in the moonlight the delicacy and distinctness of their outlines. On the left bank of the stream the occasional clumps of trees looked mysteriously black, and seemed haunted by malevolent beings that might make a sally at any minute. You could imagine them capering across the white meadows—or down the road that stretched like a line of burnished silver into the dim distance—to return before the moonbeams could catch them to their home among the tree-trunks. On one of the islands in front of me a cow moved a few steps forward, very deliberately, and stopped expectant, the moisture glistening in her large, soft eyes. Beaugency looked altogether a fantastic city now, with its great donjon silhouetted against the deep blue; its jumble of roofs, towers and sharp-pointed turrets. For a moment nothing stirred or uttered a sound except the great impatient river.

I went back, unable to bear such beauty any longer, went muttering some banal quotation from Browning about the "time and place," which gained point from the sudden bubble of rich laughter which came from a girl's heart, as I passed under the trees by the *quai*. When I reached the place du Martroi there was not a soul. The cafés were shut: no one stirred. As if realising the futility of the unequal struggle, the yellow lights had all disappeared. The moon beat breathlessly on to the broad, empty expanse of cobble-stones: the houses on one side of it were all black, the others shone blankly like faces from which personality and expression have disappeared. As I walked across the square the pavement was white like snow and my body threw a black shadow across it. I had the sensation of actually bathing in light. I could almost feel it on my forehead, and on my lips the touch of it was like a kiss that is given only once—exquisite, but tinged with an inevitable bitterness.

CHAPTER XIV

TO BLOIS

I WAS sitting on the bridge at Beaugency at about eight o'clock in the morning, two days after my arrival, when I received a sudden and quite distracting surprise. Sweeping down the middle of the stream came a long black punt of the kind used by the sand-diggers ; but no sand-digger was it who navigated the craft. In the stern, on a bright red cushion which made a pleasant patch of colour in contrast to the boat, sat a middle-aged man, dressed in a well-cut double-breasted coat of grey flannel, white flannel trousers, and neat brown shoes. He had no hat on, and as he came near me I noticed that his hair was greyish and getting thin. He was clean-shaven ; he wore a monocle ; in one hand he held the end of a light oar that stuck out at the back of the punt and acted as a rudder. For the rest he floated ; quite fast enough, no doubt, for his peace of mind. That he was an Englishman was evident, and I hailed him from the quay as he swung inshore, for he seemed undecided whether to stop at Beaugency or to pass it by.

"It's worth seeing," I suggested.

"What is there ?" he asked. "I'm gorged with ruins."

Suddenly the eye with the monocle, which, thus

assisted, must have been extraordinarily piercing, noticed the paper under my arm.

"Brute!" cried the voyager, "you've got a 'Morning Post.' I'm coming on shore."

He found a place to land, tied his boat up, came on shore, and grabbed my "Morning Post."

"I'm sorry," I said, very firmly, "but I shall come with you as far as Blois. It will take you quite ten minutes to read the paper, and in that time I shall have paid my hotel bill, sent off my luggage, and returned."

The monocle dropped from in front of the keen grey eye; but I saved him the trouble of finding an epigram by leaving him. In ten minutes I came back, unencumbered save for "Sanine" and the "Mercure de France." It was the heliotrope cover, I fancy, which really procured me my passage.

"Look here," he said, "you steer, and I'll read: I'm gorged with rivers."

He laid himself flat on his back on a long plaid rug, and read. We slid swiftly down the stream and came soon to a reach enclosed between broad yellow banks of sand, just opposite the village of Tavers. I ran the boat into the sand on the right-hand side and put out a tentative foot. Luckily I did not put out two, for the first one went in almost up to the knee. The monocle, hearing an exclamation from me, looked up and made comments. Had I not heard, he said, of the *sables-mouvants*—Les Fontenils—where the Loire changes its course constantly; where one day the sand will bear a horse and cart, the next it will engulf a child of three? These were they. I confessed my utter

ignorance and resigned the handling of the boat to abler hands. We did not land at Tavers, but on consulting Joanne I find that it is a village with 1024 inhabitants; with some famous vineyards on the banks of its brook, the Lien; the source of a stream (la Bouture) with petrifying qualities; a few remains of an old castle of the Black Prince; and some connection with the Muses through the estate of Guignes, formerly owned by Charles, the celebrated doctor, and his wife, who was Lamartine's "Elvire." The house is now occupied by the Academician Jules Lemaître. Along the valley of the Lien, the "ravin de Tavers," the French General Chanzy achieved one of his few successes with his hastily improvised army in that fatal winter of 1870. The village, embowered in trees, looked beautiful and smiling enough in the distance as we slipped by it that June morning; and to judge from his charming poem, "Mon Pays," this country-side has the attraction of peacefulness, as well as other virtues, for M. Lemaître:

" Le petit vin de chez nous
 Est chose légère ;
 J'en avale de grands coups,
 Il ne grise guère.
 Il me fait quand je le bois,
 Le cœur et l'esprit plus droits ;
 Et Rabelais aatrefois,
 En but à plein verre.

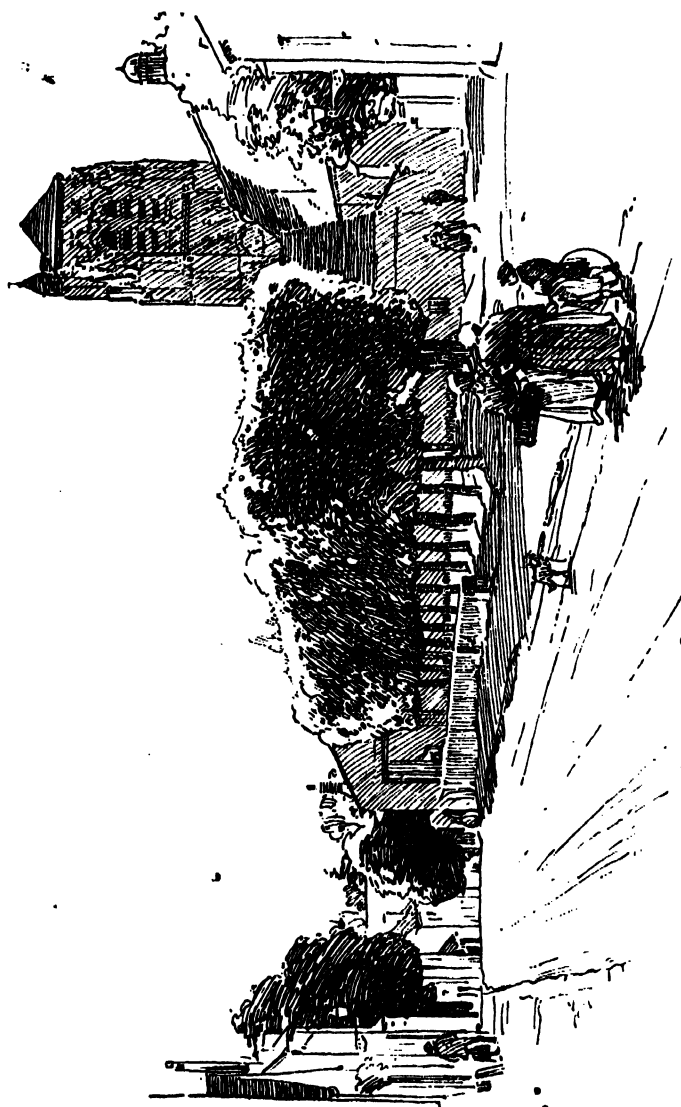
La campagne de chez nous
 A le charme intime.
 Point de paysages fous,
 Point d'horreur sublime ;
 Mais des prés moelleux aux pieds ;
 Petits bois, petits sentiers ;
 Et des rangs de peupliers
 Dont tremble la cime.

THE LOIRE

Les bonnes gens de chez nous
Ont peu de science,
Mais de l'esprit presque tous
Et de la vaillance.
Ici plus d'un travailleur
Vrai Gaulois garde en sa fleur,
Le bon sens libre et railleur
De la vieille France.

Le Grand Fleuve de chez nous
A mainte lubie,
Ses bancs de sable et ses trous,
Chacun s'en méfie,
Il est fainéant, c'est sûr ;
Mais il contient tant d'azur
Qu'à voir couler son flot pur
Je passe ma vie."

Below Tavers the Loire makes broad and graceful curves, skirts the edge of Beauce a short while longer, and then glides beneath the little hills of the left bank, after passing by the small village of St. Laurent-des-Éaux, with its quaint houses with moss-grown roofs. Nouan-sur-Loire, some miles farther down, is another pretty old village, and on the right bank is the town of Mer, which we stopped to explore. Mer is a pleasant enough little place, but does not give anything like the compact impression of Beaugency ; nor has it had so interesting a history. Such importance as it can boast seems due to its various delightful brooks which glide quick and clear by the backs of its perfumed flower-gardens and, incidentally, turn the wheels of its mills. Mer has a great market covered by a square roof, and a church with an interesting tower ; these are its principal "monuments." For myself I remember chiefly its back gardens. The Loire now leaves once more the slopes of the left bank to bathe the foot of the



• Mer

plateau of Beauce, and in a short while reflects in its waters the pretty village of Cours, whose church and château are enclosed in the park of Ménars. With Ménars begins that series of *châteaux de la Loire*, which has made Touraine one of the most famous centres in France for tourists. The house is said to have been partly designed by Mme. de Pompadour (whose brother was made Marquis de Ménars). But whether she collaborated with the architect in the making of it, or not, Ménars is a stately and beautiful house, and is fully worthy of the Pompadour's admirable taste, and of a discrimination which has left its mark on a whole period of French art. Even the monocle detached himself from the "Mercure de France" to examine the place.

As afternoon faded to evening, we slipped down the river to Blois, seven miles farther on; between long, sandy islands; between banks fringed with straight poplars on one hand, and vine-clad slopes on the other; through a large gentle, harmonious landscape bounded, in the distance, by great forests. And Blois at last!

"Blois!" said the monocle. "This is where the Chicago accent is heard in its greatest purity. I shall put you on shore. . . . Leave me your 'Mercure de France,' like a good fellow." He was incorrigible; but his parade of indifference did not take me in. He was one of a type of Englishmen quite often met with in France. His passion was to be there. To spend the greater part of the year floating down French streams, to stay in inns that took his fancy, and to potter about in towns with agreeable names was all he cared to do. No doubt the fancy took him, at intervals of decreasing frequency,

to revisit his musty flat near St. James's Park, his club, and his friends. For the rest he just loafed, preserving, of course, the crease in his trousers, and on the whole "doing himself" remarkably well.

Blois, as you approach it by river, the great old-time highway, develops itself before your eyes. In spite of the Chicago accent, it is a very French-looking city, and one of the most picturesque and attractive of all those which mirror themselves in the waters of the Loire. It has a brave stone bridge, adorned at its apex with a pointed obelisk. Over the bridge runs a highway traversing the suburb of Vienne on the left hand and stretching away, a long white line, into the heart of an imposing forest ; on the right it runs up into the middle of Blois, to the foot of one of its sharp ascents, where it turns off to the left and leads towards the château. Blois is in the shape of an amphitheatre, built in terraces up steep slopes which converge towards the Loire. On one side, on the top of a hill, is the bastard Gothic cathedral of St. Louis, looking well enough in the distance, with the Bishop's Palace enveloped in a line of thick trees on a terrace below it ; on the other side, below the bridge, rise the spires of the old abbey church of St. Nicholas. Between these two points—amid the crowding, inordinate mass of slate roofs—one can divine the curious entanglement of narrow roads, of winding alleys, staircases, and paths, and descents more or less precipitous, ending in flights of steps, the labyrinth of old houses with surprising perspectives, the ancient, odd buildings, which an exploration shows to exist. In those moments of sunset, when every outline was clear-cut against the sky, the town, with its quays lined with

white houses with slate roofs and shaded by an even line of trees, its jumble of streets and buildings, of towers and spires, looked extraordinarily lovely. It was so lovely that I neglected my duties as navigator, and was nearly borne by the swift stream into the "Ecole de Natation," a kind of wooden floating-dock with cabins all round, and a splash-about in the middle of them. We avoided the School of Natation and ran inshore under the shadow of a laundry barge, from which a flight of steps climbed the steep, stone slope that cmbanked the river. The monocle showed unexpected powers of flirtation when dealing with the elderly *blanchisseuse* who owned this establishment. She laughed delightedly at him, and promised to look after his cushions and other belongings while we dined. We dined together, in a curious old inn, the Hôtel de l'Angleterre, on the quay, by the bridge. The long dining-room of the hotel, on the first floor, looks out across the river, which is here narrower and more compact than usual, and free from islands or overmuch sand.

After dinner the monocle would not stay, being "much too old for Blois," but embarked in the moonlight. He swirled away under the bridge between the sturdy, pointed stone piers and became a black speck on the silver pathway; then he disappeared altogether.

The Chicago accent was certainly in evidence. It greeted me at the Café de Blois, where I turned in to break the shock of parting with my companion; it greeted me the following morning when I went, in the overpowering heat, to explore the château. The château is not by the river—in itself something of a disappointment—but stands on a slight elevation at the back of

the town, looking on to the rococo church of St. Vincent de Paul. In its immediate neighbourhood were several big hotels ; and the château I took to be an hotel still bigger, or a hydropathic establishment, if there were such things in France. It looked to me precisely as if it had been erected in 1880 ; a provincial Hôtel Métropole, built (as an additional attraction) to be an exact replica of the "ancient château of Blois." The discovery that this bogus affair was in truth the real thing, was a shock from which, though some considerable time has elapsed since my visit, I have not even begun to recover. It is the back view which presents itself so brazenly—with its lines of recessed windows, the niches brightly painted in red and blue, with gold ornamentation—along one side of the round *place* at the bottom of the station avenue. To enter you must climb a steep road to the left till you come to an open square—the Place du Château—on which the castle fronts. Above the doorway is an equestrian statue of Louis XII—the king who married Anne of Brittany—brilliantly painted and decorated, and dating from the sixties of the last century. An equestrian statue was there originally : but this was not it. While I examined the doorway and wondered whether I would risk disappointment by going inside, a very plump American lady with eyeglasses and a portly figure, dressed in a light holland coat with a gauzy motor veil flying behind her, got out of a large touring car with her grown-up son and daughter. She, too, paused in front of Louis XII and panted—I cannot reproduce her exact words and intonation—"Why, it's all new !" The son and daughter, who carried cameras and consulted eagerly their new red

guide-books, reproachfully rounded on her in a way that was most unfair. We all went in together and waited for the guide. The guide had the depressed, expressionless aspect of a municipal building; he seemed to have arrived, in his droning but distinct intonation, at the maximum of clearness combined with the minimum of effort. The outside appearance of the Louis XII façade is deplorable; the brightest new stone facings in contrast with the brightest cleaned red brick. The rooms of this wing, which are shown first, house a small collection of pictures, which includes some very naturalistic drawings, which sent the American son and daughter hurrying away in pink disorder. In the Musée (for which you must pay an additional fee) is the only picture of considerable interest—"La Colombine," attributed to Leonardo da Vinci. The chief feature of the Salon d'Honneur de Louis XII, the most important of the rooms shown in this part, is the carved chimney-piece, in the centre of which is Louis's device of the porcupine (or hedgehog?), surmounted by his crown. This elaborate piece of work may perhaps have been genuine; but the State-hired painters and gilders have certainly done their best to make it look like a "restoration." The next point we visited was the Chapel of St. Calais where Henri IV was married to Marguerite de Valois, the building of which, unfortunately, was not yet completed. Great blocks of new stone encumbered the floor, masons and decorators were hard at work, and there was a notice to the effect that Monsieur Un Tel was having it "restored" at his own cost. I went out again, bewildered. We crossed over now to the most celebrated wing, that of François I, on the right-hand

side as you enter. It was the *façade intérieure* of the building whose exterior abuts on to the place Victor Hugo (where the hotels are), and is the side most often shown in photographs and picture postcards of Blois. It is the wing famous in history, where Guise was murdered, in which so many curious intrigues took place, where Catherine de Médicis had her cabinet of poisons, and whence Marie de Médicis made her escape. In appearance it is meticulously ornate ; a wilderness of carvings and adornments, so intricate that the eye turns with delight to the simple dignified lines of the Gaston wing which faces you as you enter the courtyard—the despised *chef d'œuvre* of Mansard. The chief feature of the *aile* François I is the staircase, which ascends “ within a projecting pentagonal tower, open at each stage,” and is decorated with innumerable carvings, no two of which (as the guide is careful to assure you) are alike. All the rooms in this wing are elaborately painted and decorated, the designs being scrupulously true to the period. Two artists were actually at work as we entered freshening up the paint of the first of the two ante-rooms in the apartments of Catherine de Médicis, on the first floor. Everything that a paternal government could do to deprive these rooms of interest had been done. The flavour had gone out of them, so new-gilded, polished, and preserved were they. When pointed out the window of the room through which Marie de Médicis escaped when imprisoned by her son Louis XIII, one felt merely incredulous. Queens don't escape from bay-windows in the Hôtel Métropole. We were shown the private apartments of Catherine de Médicis, the bed-chamber in which she died in 1589, her chapel, and the

room beyond the chapel, in which she mixed her poisons. This small cabinet was adorned with nearly two hundred and fifty decorated panels—all of different design—and as bright as paint and varnish could make them. Here we were shown the secret cupboard where the poisons were kept—a child would find it in these days, with its eyes shut. Before ascending to the apartments of Henri III we were shown the Tour des Oubliettes and the dungeon in which the Cardinal de Guise was assassinated; his brother, the Duc de Guise, having been killed on the floor above on the previous day. Henri III's suite, on the second floor, includes two ante-rooms with carved chimney-pieces, the King's Gallery or the Salle du Conseil, his study and bedchamber. It was in the Council chamber that the Duc de Guise warmed himself by the fire on December 23rd, 1588, the morning of his assassination. He was sitting eating Brignoles plums when he was summoned to what he well knew was his death. The *vieux cabinet* where Henri waited during the murder is no longer in existence.

“ ‘Monsieur,’ began Révol, ‘the King requests your presence; he is in his *vieux cabinet*.’ . . . Guise was leisurely. He put a few plums back into his box, and threw the rest upon the ground. ‘Messieurs,’ he asked, ‘would anybody like some?’ Then, rolling up his cloak and taking it, with his long gloves and his sweet-box under his left arm, he prepared to follow Révol. ‘Adieu, Messieurs,’ he said, as he went off the stage. He knocked at the King's door; the usher opened it. . . .

As Guise entered, one of the Guards tried to give him a last chance, and trod upon his foot. Guise under-

stood, but he knew escape was impossible. The usher had come out from the King's closet, and had shut the door on the inside. Guise made two steps, then took hold of his beard with his right hand and half turned to see who was following him. The Sieur de Montsérine, who was standing by the mantelpiece, advanced and stabbed him swiftly in the left breast. 'Traitor, you will die of this !' he called out, as he dealt the thrust. The Duke hit out with his sweet-box, the only weapon in his hand. Three other men, concealed behind the tapestry, fell on him at once. '*Eh, mes amis !*' he cried. When one among the rest, called Periac, pierced him, his voice grew louder with a prayer for pity. In his struggle his sword had got entangled in his cloak, and his legs had been seized. But, with an almost superhuman effort, he dragged himself from one end of the room to another, and along the passage to Henri's bedroom, leaving bloodstains in his track. 'My God, I am dead ! Have mercy on me !' he groaned. The words were his last ; they were heard distinctly in the Council hall, and his brother, the Cardinal de Guise, was the first to catch them."

We examined the gilded bedroom in which Guise, the scarred one—le Balafré—breathed his last, the narrow passage adjoining it in which the first blows were struck, and the room in which, with odious humour, Henri had set two monks to "pray for the success of a great scheme" (without defining it), while the assassination was taking place. We examined, as I say, these rooms, and, while the guide explained exactly how the historic murder was committed, we endeavoured to feel the appropriate emotions. I can only admit that I failed.

To get a vivid impression of the whole scene the best way, I am convinced, would be to read Miss Edith Sichel's book on Catherine de Médicis, from which I have just quoted, and—unquestionably—to stay away from Blois.

Far the pleasantest memory I have of the château is of the wing already mentioned, built by Mansard for Gaston d'Orléans in 1635. This has never fallen into serious decay, so that the restorer has not had any excuse for reconstructing it. Its mellow masonry has all the exquisite colour and "quality" which are the result of the weather's seasoning through three centuries. It houses, now, the public library, and inside there is an admirable Grand Staircase.

I was glad to get away from the place. My worst fears regarding the famous châteaux were, I felt sure, about to be confirmed. For the château of Blois, at any rate, I had "no use"! I spent the rest of that sweltering morning in the School of Natation, endeavouring to keep cool, and the later afternoon (after my siesta) in leaning over the stone parapet of the quay, just below the bridge, watching serious men throwing pieces of bread to the fishes. This seemed to be the great occupation of Blois; it went on all day and late into the evening. After dinner I fell in with another of the little town's pleasant habits, which is *faire Papin*—to idle up and down the rue Denis Papin with a wandering eye. I was anxious to restore my nerves a little before undertaking the inevitable excursion that awaited me on the morrow, the excursion which no sojourner in Blois is allowed to miss—to Beauregard, Cheverny, and Chambord.

Beauregard is four and a half miles from Blois on the left bank of the river, along the straight Romorantin road. It lies near the village of Cellettes on the Beuvron, a stream which drains the centre of Sologne. The house is said to have been built by François I as a hunting-lodge, and it has been modernised and in part rebuilt. It is a pleasant manor, its chief claim to distinction being a collection of about three hundred historical portraits of the seventeenth century, and some handsome ceilings. The next village after leaving Beauregard on the right and passing through the forest of Russy is Cour-Cheverny, where the road turns off for Chambord. Its church has a tall, thin spire and an early pointed doorway with tooth mouldings. The village of Cheverny proper is farther along on the Romorantin road, and the entrance to the château is opposite the small church, which has a Norman doorway and a kind of curious wooden verandah. This château has all the charm of an old country house which has been in constant occupation. It is the home of the Marquis Henri Hurault de Vibraye, a lineal descendant of that Philippe Hurault de Cheverny, whose son built the château as it now stands, in 1634. The public are admitted courteously by the owner during the months from April to October. The hand of the restorer has been rather heavy on the house, but since it is a "human," inhabited place, his touch is not here resented as it is at Blois. Many of the rooms retain their seventeenth-century furniture and decorations, and in the dining-room and corridor are some interesting paintings on Cordova leather. A Blésois artist, one Jean Mosnier, born in 1600, painted most of the older pictures in the château, which in-

clude a number of mythological paintings. The staircase of carved stone is beautiful, and leads to an upper floor containing a fine Salle des Gardes and a state bedroom hung with tapestry, known as the *Chambre du Roi*.

You must return to Cour-Cheverny, where the road branches, to get to Chambord. On the way, you go through the little town of Bracieux, on the Beuvron, which has some half-timber buildings and an old market-house set on posts; then down long roads bordered with Austrian pines, through the forest of Boulogne, till the melancholy, "disfeatured" park of Chambord is entered, and the great blazing pile of white stone confronts you. What a fantastic "folly" of a palace it is: what a fairy-tale mansion—built by some Aladdin, with supernatural help! Who, but a person very romantic and more than a little mad, could have conceived such a building in such a place! The castle in the middle of its great park, which is enclosed by a stone wall twenty miles round, is not even on the Loire. The country in which it is set is the sandy marshland of Sologne—dotted with lakes and ponds, and divided by a network of small rivers—whose only "use," until the advent of scientific agriculture, was the excellence of the sport which it afforded.* Chambord is a prodigious hunting-box. But if it has no advantages of situation to recommend it, it must be admitted that the building needs none.

There had been a feudal castle on the spot before 1519 (when the present pile was first conceived by François I), which the Court visited for the hunting in the Sologne swamps. The actual building of the new palace

began in 1526, from the designs of Pierre le Nepveu, dit Trinqueau, the architect of Chenonceaux ; and



A side street in Blois

eighteen hundred men are said to have been at work on it year after year. When François I died in 1547, only the centre of the building and the east wing con-

taining his own apartments were finished. In one of these private rooms the arch-philanderer wrote on a window-pane—according to Brantôme, who, in his “*Vie des Dames Galantes*,” declares that he saw^o it *de ses propres yeux*—the famous words, “*Toute femme varie.*” The apocryphal legend gives the couplet :

“Souvent femme varie,
Bien fol qui s’y fie.”

Henri II added a wing, and changes were made by Louis XIV, who apparently thought the enormous place too small for him, for he had plans prepared for two additional wings, which, however, were never built. Stanislaus Lesczinski, the ex-King of Poland and Louis XV’s father-in-law, lived in the palace between 1725 and 1733. He had the moat filled up, thus utterly spoiling the effect of the building, which used to rise up gracefully from arches, and now sprawls heavily on the ground. Here he and his queen lived for eight years “in the practice of all the Christian virtues.” A worthier occupant was the celebrated Maréchal de Saxe, who was given the house by the King in 1748, three years after the battle of Fontenoy.

Maurice de Saxe, the natural son of Augustus II, Elector of Saxony, and the fine-spirited and beautiful Aurora von Königsmark, was the only master Chamberlain ever known with an imagination splendid enough to do it justice. This great genius, who was, as the saying is, “every inch a king,” though the bar sinister stood between him and his father’s dominions, is one of those historical figures about whom it is impossible to read without a quickened pulse. Did he not win the battle of Fontenoy, seated in a Bath chair,

too ill to walk, and enliven the monotonous intervals between the battles of his brilliant campaigns with the performances of Mme. Favart, the celebrated beauty, and his private operatic troupe? As a young man with dark, handsome features and brilliant blue eyes, he was famous as the lover of Adrienne Lecouvreur. His genius for love and war showed itself characteristically in his life at Chambord, which Louis XV presented to him as a reward for his services. He built barracks for twelve hundred cavalry, went in for horse-breeding, and kept an immense hunting stable, and a menagerie. "Chambord," says Mr. Theodore Andrea Cook, "became a gay garrison town, with a stirring combination of military display, sporting activities, and occasional dramatic episodes. His regiment retained the name of 'Volontaires de Saxe,' which had been given them when they were raised in 1743. They wore green uniforms, with helmets of gilt brass, enriched with a russia leather turban and surmounted by a horsehair tuft. The Uhlans carried sabre, lance, and pistols, the Dragoons had a rifled carbine and sword, and one troop was composed of negroes on white horses. All that was best in French society visited Chambord for a time, fascinated by its host's charming mixture of 'Persian apparatus' and downright simplicity.

Maurice de Saxe never stopped dreaming till he died. As soon as the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle was signed, he asked to be made King of Madagascar. Finding that impracticable, he thought of making Tobago, in the Antilles, the nucleus of a Western Empire. He dreamt of sovereignty in Corsica—he dreamt of heading a crusade of Israelites to America. In the intervals of

these attractive visions, he always found time for fresh adventure nearer home. His love affair with Mlle. Verrières resulted in a daughter, named Marie Aurore, who became the mother of Georges Sand. Quite suddenly in November, 1750, France learnt that the great General was no more. . . . 'Life,' he said, as he lay dying, 'is all a dream. Mine is short ; but it has been a good one.' " Thus characteristically he brought to a close a career which, as Mr. James has remarked with his usual felicity, " would have been longer had he been less determined to make it agreeable."

Napoleon I gave Chambord to his Chief-of-Staff, Marshal Berthier, from whose widow it was bought by the nation in 1821 for the future Comte de Chambord. The place owes its preservation to royalist sentiment, for it has several times been threatened by owners who, in spite of rank and fortune, were unable to keep it up. Though empty and uninhabited, it is kept now in good repair. The famous *lanterne*, which bears high above the bewildering front of stonework, carved chimneys, turrets, and dormers, a colossal *fleur de lis*, still crowns the whole edifice. The interior is not of great interest ; though the double spiral staircase has been restored to its original form, and still forms the chief attraction, as it did in Evelyn's day. Evelyn descended the river by boat, stopping at a village called St. Dieu, where the party left their " barke " and " hired horses to Blois by the way of Chambourg, a famous house of the King's, built by Francis I in the middle of a solitary parke, full of deere ; the enclosure is a wall. I was particularly desirous," he says, " of seeing this palace from the ex-

travagance of the designe, especially the stayre-case mentioned by Palladio. It is said that 1800 workmen were constantly employ'd in this fabric for twelve years: if so, it is wonderfull that it was not finish'd, it being no greater than divers gentlemen's houses in England, both for roome or circuit. The carvings are very rich and full. The stayre-case is devised with four entries or ascents, which cross one another, so that tho' four persons meete, they never come in sight, but by small loopeholes, till they land. It consists of 274 stepps (as I remember), and is an extraordinary worke, but of far greater expense than use or beauty. The chimneys of the house appeare like so many towres."

Some of the rooms, a very few out of the 440 which the palace numbers, contain furniture and works of art, in keeping with them; and the private theatre in which Molière gave the first performance of his *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* is, of course, preserved untouched. But, on the whole, human interest is lacking at Chambord. The effect of the great, gleaming white building, with its bewildering dark roofs, is a melancholy one; the touch of madness in its conception disturbs. It is impossible to avoid the thought that the great artist who made this wondrous thing might have been better employed making something else, somewhere else. Chambord is an elaborate, exquisite "folly." But to visit it, when you are at Blois, is a hackneyed excursion which it is nevertheless unwise to "cut."

CHAPTER XV

CHAUMONT AND AMBOISE

ONE more day I spent in Blois, before going on towards Tours. It was overpoweringly hot ; and I can recall nothing that I did save the discovery of what I was assured was a traditional song of the town. It was declared by my informant, a priest, to be connected only with a local tradition. There is no doubt, however, that other versions of the same idea are to be found in all folk-song throughout Europe, and it has points of similarity with our own "Lord Rendal." I give it for its own sake, as I have not yet come across it in print.

"Quand Renaud de la guerre vint
Portant ses tripes dans ses mains,
Sa mère à la fenêtre en haut
Dit Voici venir mon fils Renaud.

—Renaud, Renaud, réjouis-toi
Ta femme est accouchée d'un' roi.
—Ni de ma femme, ni de mon fils
Mon cœur ne peut se réjouir.

Qu'on me fasse vite un lit blanc
Pour que je m'y couche dedans—
Et quand il fut mis dans le lit,
Pauvre Renaud rendit l'esprit.

—Or dites-moi, mère m'amie,
Qu'est-ce que j'entends cogner ici ?
Ma fille ce sont les charpentiers
Qui raccomodent les greniers.

—Or dites-moi, mère m'amie,
Qu'est-ce que j'entends chanter ici ?

—Ma fille, ce sont les processions
Qu'on fait autour de nos maisons.

—Or dites-moi, mère m'amie,
Quelle robe prendrai-je aujourd'hui ?

—Quittez le ros', prenez le gris,
Prenez le noir pour mieux choisir.

—Or dites-moi, mère m'amie
Qu'ai-je donc à pleurer ici ?

—Ma fille je ne puis plus vous l'cacher ;
Renaud est mort et enterré.

Terre ouvre toi, terre fends toi
Que je rejoigne Renaud mon roi ;
Terre s'ouvrit, terre se fendit,
Et la belle fut engloutie."

I left Blois very early in the morning by train for Onzain, on the banks of the Cisse—a little river which, like so many of its affluents in Touraine and the Orléanais, runs parallel with the Loire, about a mile or two away from it. It debouches into the big river at Vouvray just above Tours. Onzain has not much interest now. The fine park of its château is still to be seen, but the house—where Voltaire was a visitor and where he wrote his feeble play "La Pucelle"—was sacked and destroyed at the Revolution. The chief importance of Onzain nowadays is that every tourist, save those who travel by automobile, alights at its station to visit Chaumont. Chaumont is about a mile away, across the long, uneven suspension bridge ; perfectly situated on a hill above the river, embowered in green, the green of grass and of trees, and with the few straggling houses of its village underneath it. It is a great gleaming palace, a medley of towers and turrets which group

beautifully together. But, alas, Chaumont, like Blois, has been despoiled of interest by the restorer. The nearer you get to it the more it takes on the appearance of the new Highland mansion of a millionaire, in the "Baronial" style; its restoration makes it look like a modern imitation of itself. Mr. Henry James has described it as "a vast, clean-scraped mass, with big round towers ungarnished with a leaf of ivy or a patch of moss," which looks "rather like an enormously magnified villa." It is hard to people it—in imagination—with the figures of those who assuredly occupied it: Cardinal d'Amboise, Louis XII's Prime Minister; Diane de Poitiers (who was forced by Catherine de Médicis to exchange Chenonceaux for it); and Catherine herself being among them. It is now the property of the Prince de Broglie-Say.

The entrance is on the south side, over a drawbridge, and through a gateway flanked by swelling towers adorned with the initials of Louis XII and Anne de Bretagne. Once through the doors, you find yourself in the Cour d'Honneur, the most beautiful part of the castle, one of whose sides—that hiding the view over the Loire—was removed in the eighteenth century. The result of this alteration is a terracé from which is a haunting view across the great, island-studded river and the forests and woods of the Gâtine. The latter, immortalised by Ronsard, who lived in it, is a rich district dotted with ancient houses and estates.

Many times in the course of my journey through the *Centre* I had been warned that at Blois and in Touraine I should find myself in the *jardin de la France*!—a phrase, by the way, which may be traced to Rabelais.

I had looked forward to it with irritation, as one anticipates a meeting with people or places extravagantly praised in advance. At Vorey, Feurs, Roanne, Nevers, the innkeepers with one consent had warned



The Cisse at Onzain

me of the rich beauty of this very spot. And, oddly enough, they had not exaggerated. After the gorges of the Haute-Loire and the Forez I think that part of the river which lies between Blois and Vouvray is one of its most beautiful stretches. "La rive droite," writes Ardouin-Dumazet, "est une haute berge couronnée

par la forêt. D'anciens logis, qui furent des gentil-hommières ou des maisons des champs des notables d'autrefois, ont, entre leurs jardins fleuris, une grâce gentiment vieillotte. La grande route court au sommet de la levée ; à mi-côte, le chemin de fer franchit les ravins par des ponts de pierre. Plus haut, entre les vignes, un joli chemin, en corniche, offre des vues superbes sur les forêts et les lointains de la Sologne." This passage, of course, describes the view from the right bank, not that from the terrace of Chaumont, which, however, was hardly less splendid. The great point about these Loire landscapes, as a fellow-traveller remarked to me at Blois, is that they are so "large."

Chaumont's fearful air of neatness and newness is the result, no doubt, of a too violent reaction from ill-treatment. Less than a century ago it was used as a factory for pottery and ceramics, conducted by an Italian named Nini. The potters were still at work when Benjamin Constant and Mme. de Staël came to live there after the latter's exile by Napoleon, to a distance of forty leagues from Paris. "J'aime mieux," she wrote, stately even in annoyance, "le ruisseau d'eau noire et bourbeuse que je voyais à Paris couler sous mes fenêtres que cette Loire avec ses 'ondes claires et limpides.'"

Amboise is about a dozen miles below Chaumont on the same side of the river. At Onzain it had seemed so perfect a day that I had decided to walk, and my belongings had been sent on. Now—so hot was the sun—I regretted my rashness. The road, however, following the river's course and winding along at the foot of vine-clad slopes, proved to be sufficiently beautiful to

make the heat just bearable. Pleasant villages sprang up at regular intervals, each with a shady café garden in which the wayfarer might rest : Pilly, Mosnes, Chargé. On the right bank—across the great river, all streaked with yellow sand-banks—were more vines, varied by woods and the parks surrounding gracious châteaux. The real Touraine does not begin till the department of Loir-et-Cher is left for that of Indre-et-Loire, a mile or two below Chaumont. The château of Amboise dominates the country-side just like Chaumont, which, so far as situation goes, it resembles. But then Amboise is at once more attractive ; the little place laughs at you roguishly from under its great castle ; the whole picture is delicious and likeable ; and what comfort there was to be had in its inn ! In his book “ A Little Tour in France,” Mr. James has described the place as “ A little white-faced town staring across an admirable bridge and leaning, as it were, against the pedestal of rock on which the dark castle masses itself. The town is so small, the pedestal so big, and the castle so high and striking, that the clustered houses at the base of the rock are like the crumbs that have fallen from a well-laden table. You pass among them, however, to ascend by a circuit to the château, which you attack obliquely from behind.” The chief feature of the castle is its great cylindrical tower, which flanks, on the north, the façade facing the river. This is really the entrance to the château, for it contains, inside, a spiral roadway paved with red bricks, so gently sloped that a carriage or a motor-car can be driven to the top. Charles V, when he visited Francis I here in 1539, rode up it on horseback.

Amboise is full of historical memories, some of them as dark as any in French annals. The palace was built by Charles VIII on the site of the old feudal castle in which he was born; and here he died in 1498, knocking his head against the lintel of a low stone doorway as he was running to pick up a tennis-ball. Historians describe this, I fancy, as a pleasing fiction, and assert that apoplexy was the more probable if less picturesque cause. Francis I, who contrived to lend some of the lustre of his personality to most of the houses in which he lived, conferred the distinction on Amboise of enshrining the remains of Leonardo da Vinci. He imported Leonardo, and gave him the house of Clos-Lucé in the town to live in. Here the painter died in 1519, but was buried in the castle, in the chapel of St. Florentin, now destroyed. In the religious struggles of the latter half of the sixteenth century the château of Amboise witnessed such horrible crimes that a blight since those days seems to have fallen upon it. In the courtyard, placid enough now, the bodies of those concerned in the conspiracy of La Renaudie were hung from the galleries. In 1560 Mary Stuart was forced by her redoubtable mother-in-law, Catherine de Médicis, to witness the wholesale execution of twelve hundred of those concerned in this plot to seize the person of the King. Heads cut from rebel bodies were piled on the balconies from which the view across the Loire is now so attractive; the river itself was dotted with hundreds of corpses of Huguenots drowned in the *noyades*; while from the branches of the trees all round the castle hung the bodies of conspirators.

The palace became, when the Court had finally

deserted it, a State prison. But its worst fate befell it after the Revolution, when it became the property of the third Consul, Roger Ducos—a vandal who pulled down one part of the building and defaced the rest. Louis Philippe restored the chapel and built some vulgar apartments for the Algerian chief, Abd-el-Kader, who was confined at Amboise from 1847 to 1852. In 1872 the National Assembly gave it back to the House of Orléans; it is now used by the Duc d'Orléans as an asylum for old servants of the family, and is always open to visitors. You tip a concierge who lives to the left of the entrance.

The town—which has a faubourg on the Ile St. Jean in midstream and another on the right bank called St. Denis-Hors, the three parts being connected by a fine stone bridge—is placid enough at first sight, but is found on close inspection to have quite a commercial air. Various things are manufactured here, including fishing-rods and fishing-tackle, of which it boasts one of the largest factories in France. Architecturally, Amboise contains little of interest besides its château. The Hôtel de Ville, near the bridge, dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century, but it has been restored with insufferable completeness. There is a good gateway, with a pointed arch and high-pitched roof surmounted by a lantern turret, and the Transitional Church of St. Denis is a fine building. From the top of the castle tower, however, and from the castle gardens, I had seen in the distance the twin towers of Tours Cathedral a dozen miles down the valley, and I was impatient to be gone. I must confess that I did not stop to visit the Pagode de Chanteloup, a tall tower, built

in stages diminishing in circumference—all that has survived the destruction of the château of Chanteloup where the Duc de Choiseul, Louis XV's minister, was exiled after his passage-at-arms with the great Dubarry. Choiseul built his pagoda as a memorial of the sympathy received by him from all sides, on the occasion of his fall. Napoleon gave the property to Chaptal, the scientist-politician, whom he created Comte de Chanteloup. Chaptal kept the title and sold the house to the "Bande Noire," who had it demolished in 1823.

The most important place between Amboise and Tours is Vouvray, on the right bank of the river. It is renowned for its vineyards, which produce a white wine, not perhaps of the first rank of Loire wines, but not by any means to be despised. The vineyards of Vouvray produce also a sparkling wine, which the Tourangeaux patriotically profess to prefer to champagne. It is a sweet, fragrant little town, surrounded by charming country houses. But the most beautiful part of Vouvray is along the wooded banks of the Cisse, loveliest of gentle streams, which runs into the Loire just above the town. The Cisse is "boatable," not only for canoes, but for almost any type of river craft.

The railway crosses the river above Vouvray and passes the village of Montlouis, on the left bank; a place situated on a hill riddled with those troglodyte dwellings which are a feature of this part of the Loire valley. Evelyn, who passed through Montlouis on his way to Tours, remarks that it has "no house above ground, but such only as are hewn out of the maine rocks which are of excellent free-stone. Here and there the funnell of a chimney appears on the surface amongst

the vineyards which are over them, and in this manner they inhabit the caves, as it were sea-cliffs, on one side of the river for many miles." The traveller to-day has no fault to find with the accuracy of this picture, though the church, not mentioned here, is perched on



The Cisse near Vouvray

the top of a hill and commands a fine view of Tours. After passing Montlouis the train runs into the station of St. Pierre-des-Corps, just outside the town. Here, unless you are lucky enough to be in a through train, you must change into another, in order to reach the central station in the middle of the city.

CHAPTER XVI

TOURS

TOURS has an immense air of good breeding. You feel it at once, as soon as you turn out of the great bare plain in front of the station into the Boulevard Heurteloup—immediately impressive with its lines of huge trees—towards the place du Palais de Justice. The traveller has only to sit for a few minutes outside the Café de l'Univers or the café that faces it, at the end of the Avenue de Grammont, to realise that here life is lived decently and in order. He finds himself reflecting on the repair or otherwise of his evening shirts, and noticing the well-cut tweed coats of the men and women who move among the trees in front of him, many of which hang from English shoulders. The place has entirely the atmosphere of a capital city. You expect the elegant carriage of a princess, drawn by admirable horses and attended by impassive servants, to cross the square amid a pleasant rustle and flutter of excitement. It is not, possibly, “smart”—the society of Tours: a step above *that*. You have visions of portentously dull entertainments in lofty, gilded saloons where everything is rather icily magnificent. But the fine flavour of that elaborate social structure which has the idea of monarchy for

its foundation, is apparent at once. Tours is what Orléans ought to be, and is not.

Writer after writer describes the cleanness of Tours and the whiteness of its houses. A gentleman of quality of the eighteenth century notes the careful washing of its roads with "water supplied by six beautiful fountains which keeps continually running through them from different quarters." Evelyn admires the place immensely. "No citty in France," he says, "exceeds it in beauty or delight." He finds the streets "very long, strait, spacious, well-built, and exceeding cleane." His description of the Mall, which I did not succeed in discovering, is so true of so many tree-shaded avenues in towns on the Loire that I quote it: "The Mall without comparison is the noblest in Europe for length and shade, having seven rows of the tallest and goodliest elms I had ever beheld, the innermost of which do so embrace each other, and at such a height, that nothing can be more solemn and majestical." The Queen of England came to Tours when he was there, "going for Paris," and "was very nobly receiv'd by the People and the Cleargy, who went to meete her with the trained bands." Tours in Evelyn's time was at the height of its splendour. He refers to the "very considerable trade with silk-wormes" and the various processes in the manufacture of silk, which he witnessed. This trade was in the hands of the Huguenots, and after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685—that act so disastrous to French commerce—the town lost much of its prosperity and many of the best of its inhabitants. It has hardly now, though gaining yearly in importance, succeeded in recapturing the position

among French cities which it enjoyed in the seventeenth century.

Mr. James's readers will not forget the little pencil sketch he has made of it: "It is a very agreeable little city; few towns of its size are more ripe, more complete, or, I should suppose, in better humour with themselves and less disposed to envy the responsibilities of bigger places. It is truly the capital of its smiling province; a region of easy abundance, of good living, of genial, comfortable, optimistic, rather indolent opinions."

It is quite wonderful how Tours assimilates and keeps in their place those ubiquitous green Homburg hats, and the costly touring cars of their owners. These cars are for ever snorting with a kind of majestic slowness up and down the long, absolutely straight central artery which begins on the south side of the Avenue de Grammont, crosses the Place du palais de Justice, and becomes the rue Nationale. This pompous and not pleasing eighteenth-century main street crosses the heavy Pont de Tours and climbs the wooded hill of St. Symphorien. Tours must be tremendously "on the way" to places where the world amuses itself, and it is surprising how strong the "English" impression still is; like the royalist. At the time when I first became aware of it, outside the Café de l'Univers, I knew nothing of the history of the town. Guide-books, consulted since, reveal the fact that Henry II added it to the English crown, and that it was not restored to France until 1242, after which date it became a favourite residence of the French kings from Louis IX to François I.

The English connection with the place seems from

very early times to have been strong. Even the cathedral is said to have been built in part by English artisans. In the seventeenth century it was of all French towns perhaps the one most frequently visited by English travellers. A seventeenth-century English country squire, Sir G. Courthope, for instance, mentions in his diary that he chose it to stay in in order to study the language. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was one of the recognised points in the "Grand Tour" undertaken to complete the education of persons of quality; and in the nineteenth century, indeed until the sudden vogue of the Riviera, there was a permanent English colony of over 2000 people in the town. It used to be largely recommended by English doctors, owing to the agreeable nature of its climate and situation, for persons suffering from chest affections. Nowadays it is one of the greatest tourists' centres in France for English and Americans, nearly all the more celebrated châteaux of the Loire being within an easy distance of it.

On the whole—to the sentimentalist sensitive to impressions—the French Republic makes a bad show at Tours. It has not acquired that trick of dignity—legacy of the ages—which the royal city so gracefully wears. Its new Hôtel de Ville, of gleaming white stone, is sumptuous, ornate, imposing, if you like, but altogether lacking in style. In a country so full of fine palaces of honourable age, this affair looks dreadfully bourgeois. Four large carved figures of nude labourers, crushed under enormous burdens, are to be seen over the three central entrances of the building, supporting the long stone balcony. They seem, those four helpless

ouvriers, like so many Atlases to be bearing almost the whole weight of the heavy, over-decorated Republican monument on their bowed shoulders. What an opportunity is there for the acid humour of "L'Assiette au Beurre !"

The Republic has rechristened the rue Royale the rue Nationale. It was at Number 89, a house now occupied by a dentist and adorned with an inscription, that the great *tourangeau*, Balzac, was born in 1799. Thanks to him, few towns and districts in France have a more enduring place in literature. How often has he described the city and the country surrounding it in such stories as "La Grenadière," "Le Lys dans la Vallée," "Le Curé de Tours"; and the essential characteristics of the *tourangeaux*, are they not shown with a Rabelaisian humour in the collection of stories having their scenes in the châteaux of the neighbourhood, which he called "Contes Drolatiques"? The *tourangeau* and especially the *tourangelle*, he would have us know, love the best of everything, are rich feeders, appreciating all the delights of the table—are artists in all that is indicated by the term "good living."

I had spent quite two days in Tours before I could rouse myself to explore it. I had sunk into my hotel—an old-fashioned, quiet place, surrounding a discreet courtyard—as into a feather bed. The café of cafés—whose little tables spread themselves right on to and over a tree-shaded island in the middle of the road, and surrounded a statue of Balzac—was merely round the corner. At night, for dissipation's sake, I used to cross sometimes from this café to the one opposite, which also spread itself out under another group of trees, and

had the additional advantage of a red-coated orchestra, whose leader was blessed with a powerful tenor voice. I can see him vividly, standing up outside the brilliantly lighted room, backed by the open grand piano, throwing out his arms with thrilling gestures. His great voice came across to me as I sat under the shadow of an enormous elm, came through the warm, night air in all the sensuous appeal of the hackneyed love song: "O sole mio." The familiar tune has never sounded quite so passionate to me before or since.

When I at length managed to rouse myself from the comfortable lethargy into which the mere fact of being in Tours had thrown me, I was appalled by the number of things to see. The picture postcard shops, faithful indications of a town's attractions, were bristling with châteaux, towers, cathedrals, churches, old houses, scenery. The agonies which the earnest Cookite, anxious to "do" everything in eight days, must endure, were too horrible to contemplate. Among the châteaux, I studied photographs of Chenonceaux (which Diane de Poitiers had to exchange for Chaumont), Azay-le Rideau, fabled Chinon on the Vienne nine miles above its junction with the Loire, and Loches, where Agnes Sorel, la "Belle des Belles," was buried. The body of the beautiful mistress of Charles VII, who inspired him to fight against the English, and whose memory, like that of our own Nell Gwynn, is justly beloved, does not lie at Loches now. Her marble tomb still remains (*vide* Joanne) in the church of St. Ours, but the Canons objecting to her on account of her sins, an objection still fierce and burning after over three centuries, got leave from Louis XVI to open the tomb and remove

her unfortunate remains. Other places which, like Loches, I explored in imagination were Châteaudun, Montrichard, a great square keep above the Cher, and the ruined château of St. Aignan. There, indeed, they all were ; but with a sigh of relief, not unmixed with a hungry glance or two at Loches, I realised that hardly any of them was on the Loire, and that I should not be forced to visit them for my vow's sake. In Tours itself there was enough to see, in all conscience.

The cathedral of St. Gatien, which was the objective of my first walk of exploration, is on the left of the rue Nationale, at the end of the rue Scellerie—a very attractive and harmonious Gothic building, with an elaborate façade flanked by two imaginative towers that rise in stages and are topped by curious Renaissance domes. Its situation, hemmed in by narrow streets, is unusual, and it seems to jump suddenly up at you ; to be always round the corner ; to greet you abruptly from whatever side you may approach it. And almost at no point can you stand right back and observe it from a distance. The narrow and very quiet streets press closely in upon it, except on the western side, where it faces its little square.

The church was a long time in the making, but it is, all of it, sufficiently old to have blended. The present cathedral is a rebuilding dating from 1225, and incorporating some portions of an older church that was burnt down in 1164 as the result of a quarrel between Louis VII of France and Henry II of England. The choir was finished in 1265, and contains some magnificent contemporary glass ; the latest part of the work was not completed till 1547. In the first chapel on the

right of the choir is the most charming of the church's monuments, the white marble tomb of Anne de Bretagne's two children by her first husband, Charles VIII. The little boy and girl are seen lying side by side on a black marble slab, watched over at head and foot by a pair of kneeling angels: and the whole is a most beautiful piece of work by the celebrated sculptor of Tours, Michel Colomb. It was put here in 1815, after the destruction of the church of St. Martin, where it rested originally. Another very attractive feature of St. Gatien is the old cloister of the singing school (Psalette), reached through a door in the north transept. It is a peaceful place, nestling under the sheer walls of the cathedral, with a little garden in the midst of it and a charming turret in one corner, enclosing a spiral staircase winding up to a low, open gallery.

Close to the cathedral is the municipal collection of pictures—more beautifully housed than any provincial collection that I have seen. It has lately been distributed through the stately apartments of the Archevêché, whose northern windows look on to the southern side of the cathedral, and whose southern windows admire a formal garden enclosed by a high stone wall. The entrance to the Archevêché is through the black doors of an elaborate Ionic gateway, reconstructed from the materials of a demolished Arc de Triomphe. I do not remember that among the pictures in the stately archiepiscopal apartments there is anything of particular interest; but the rooms themselves are all beautiful, and some contain excellent furniture in keeping with them. The one I recall most clearly is the state bedroom, which has two exquisite pieces of

framed Gobelins tapestry (by Gozette after Drouais le Fils).

Perhaps a finer church even than the cathedral must have been the vast Basilica of St. Martin, of which two isolated towers are all that remains. Their distance from one another is a sufficient indication of the immense size of the building. It was pillaged by the Huguenots during the religious wars and suffered damage, but it was reserved for the "Futurist" enthusiasm of the First Republic to demolish it altogether—to make way for a street! This public work was accomplished in 1802.

The precise rue Nationale ends in a flourish with two large buildings that exactly balance one another, and face two formal gardens, in front of the river, between which begins the massive Pont de Tours. The left-hand building is the *Mairie*, that on the right the Natural History Museum. They have a certain splendour, these two buildings, especially when viewed from the faubourg of St. Symphorien on the other side of the river. In front of them rest the long steam trams that start for Vouvray, Rochecorbon, and Luynes; and in the gardens are statues of two geniuses, poles asunder in temperament, yet both essentially Gallic and both sons of Touraine—Rabelais opposite the *Mairie* and Descartes opposite the *Musée*.

I have mentioned the principal sights of Tours in this order because I happened to see them thus on the first of the days that I devoted to exploration. Subsequently I wandered altogether at haphazard: without looking even at the picture postcard shops to see what I should see." Chance, for instance, brought me one day

to the fantastically named *Maison de Tristan l'Hermite* in the rue Brignonnet. It was not built till long after Louis XI's myrmidon was in his grave, but is no less interesting on that account. It is a beautiful brick house with elaborately carved stone facings, and its façade masks a charming courtyard.

A more interesting memory than that of Louis XI's hangman which Tours recalls is that of the accomplished and beautiful Mlle. La Vallière—the first and best of the Grand Monarque's three celebrated mistresses—who was born here. She seems to have loved Louis sincerely, and to have remarked "What a pity he is a king" from the bottom of her heart. All she cared about was to be near him and to please him, and when Madame de Montespan supplanted her, her grief was so overpowering that she thought she should die of it. Even in her repentance she seems (unlike Madame de Montespan) to have been as sincere as her affection for her royal lover was genuine; so much so that the outspoken Bossuet remarked of her, "This soul will be a miracle of grace." I do not know whether this attractive woman's birthplace is still pointed out—in any case I did not see it—but it was pleasant to think that her dainty feet had trodden the quiet streets by the cathedral.

There are some interesting old houses in the place Foire le Roi, near the Quays. Most of the old part of the town, however, which still remains, is to be found on the left side of the rue Nationale, down the rue du Commerce, and in the narrow streets near the two great towers of St. Martin's Church. At the corner of the rue du Change and the rue de la Mopnaie is a gabled house adorned with elaborate wood-carvings;

and close to it, in the place de Châteauneuf, is an old stone inn with curious turrets and gables—the Hôtel de la Croix Blanche.

The excursions by tramway that may be made from Tours seem endless, and I do not profess to have made them all. I spent a pleasant day, however, on the Cher, at St. Avertin—gentle village nestling under wooded slopes, two miles to the south of Tours. The Cher is a placid stream which dawdles along in no hurry to join the Loire—a meeting which, by the way, it postpones until it gets to Cinq-Mars. Other excursions are to Plessis-les-Tours, about a mile and a quarter to the left of the town, midway between the Loire and the Cher; and, upstream, on the right bank, to Marmoutier and Rochecorbon. The former, it must be admitted, is not at all worth seeing. A better plan for getting an idea of Louis XI's great stronghold is to read two chapters of "Quentin Durward" in your favourite café, and not to visit it. The fragment that remains is a single wing of red brick with new stone window-frames. It contains the "alleged" room in which Louis XI died in 1483; but the building has, of course, been restored out of any interest which it may once have possessed. There is no suggestion now of those "pretty gardens full of nightingales" mentioned by Evelyn, nor of the chapel in which Ronsard was buried.

The abbey of Marmoutier is far more worth a visit. It nestles under a cliff, in which were the grottoes where St. Martin and St. Gatien used to retire to pray, and though amid the remains of the old abbey a modern convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart has been erected in the most debased style of sixty

years ago, there is still much of interest. Further on, on the "precipice of a dreadful cliff, from whence the country and river yeald a most incomparable prospect," are the ruins of the fortress of Rochecorbon, the chief feature of which is the *lanterne*, or watch tower, like an enormous and very high square chimney, which looks out over the Loire.

Tours rewards the strenuous sight-seer with infinite opportunities for rest. The cafés are arranged to face one another, thus affording the loungee the greatest possible amount of diversion with the minimum of trouble. At the bridge end of the rue Nationale, for instance, you either sit outside the Café du Commerce and watch the people sitting outside the Café de la Ville, or you sit outside the Café de la Ville and watch the habitués sweetening their yellowish-green poison outside the Café du Commerce. Drinking Pernod in the sunlight in preparation for large and sumptuous meals, reading "L'Illustration" and watching the passers-by, is not, however, an occupation that quite *never* wearies. The sun, for instance, was insufferably hot, and sent one in search of a school of natation. (Why French people, when they want to swim, must always do so in' an *école* is a mystery which persons better acquainted with the *nuances* of the language must explain.) I found what I wanted on the wooded Ile Aucard, reached by a suspension bridge—the highest upstream of the three bridges of Tours—to cross which a toll of a sou is charged. To reach the bathing-place you walk through the Pré Catalan, a charming, shady spot laid out with tennis-lawns—a kind of provincial Ile de Puteaux. The row of dressing-sheds

looks on to a strip of warm, sandy beach. Part of the river has been marked off where the current (though swift) is not too swift ; and the result is one of the most delightful, verdant bathing-places that I have ever seen. It is as cheerful as the sea, and yet as well furnished with trees (in the background) as Parson's Pleasure. The water was so warm that one could stay in comfortably for an hour ; and the current allowed one to be either lazy or strenuous, as one's mood dictated. One could either get in at the top and float down with the stream to the end, or get in at the bottom and swim hard against the stream to the top. In between times nothing could be more agreeable than a cigarette in the sunshine on the sandy beach, with the twin towers of the cathedral standing up, flowerlike, in the distance.

Tours, as I look back, seems to be a place undisturbed by shouting ; it attracts by its mellow, gently modulated tones ; it is soothing, luxurious, kindly, humorous, and yet splendid. My last memory of it is the most soothing of all. I was strolling at random down a quiet street at the back of the cathedral when I saw a woman sitting on the doorstep of a house, in the dying rays of the sun, crooning over the baby in her lap :

“ Dodo, petite,
Dodo, mon ange !
Dans la grange
O y a une poule blanche
Qui va pondre un p'tit coco,
Pour la petite,
Si alle est sage ! ”

CHAPTER XVII

FROM TOURS TO SAUMUR

THE soft richness of the landscape seemed actually to increase below Tours. Abrupt cliffs, crowned often with trees, form the right bank ; on the left lie wide, green pastures and gracious woods. By the time the frontier of Anjou is reached, below Langeais and below the junction of the great river Vienne with the Loire, that "douceur angevine" of which Joachim du Bellay has written so often, has been joyfully appreciated. Luynes, the first spot of interest as you descend the river, about six miles below Tours and joined with it by a steam tramway, is a curious little place dominated by its historic château, half fortress and half dwelling-house. At Montlouis I had seen a village of cave-dwellers ; here was a veritable town of them. The cliff beneath which Luynes shelters is positively honey-combed with grôttos.

It has the reputation of being a very merry place ; its young men and maidens have always been given to dancing and singing, and it was for the youth of Luynes that, three generations back, Paul Louis Courrier made his celebrated "Pétition pour les villageois qu'on empêche de danser." It is not solely the young people, it should be remarked, who are fond of dancing. "Gay grandsires" also like to foot it. Perhaps Goldsmith

was thinking of this part of the world when he wrote in "The Traveller":

"How often have I led thy sportive choir,
 With tuneless pipe beside the murmuring Loire,
 Where shading elms along the margin grew,
 And freshened from the wave the zephyr flew !
 And haply—though my harsh touch, falt'ring still,
 But mocked all tune, and marred the dancer's skill—
 Yet would the village praise my wondrous power,
 And dance, forgetful of the noon-tide hour.
 Alike all ages : dames of ancient days
 Have led their children through the mirthful maze ;
 And the gay grandsire, skilled in gestic lore,
 Has frisked beneath the burden of threescore."

The mixture of caution and joyousness in the peasant character is shown in the popular song, "A la St. Jean je m'accueillis" (On the feast of St. Jean I hired myself to a farm).

"A la St. Jean je m'accueillis,
 Je n'y fus qu'un jour et demi.
 Allons, allons, allons trétous,
 Quand je ne puis couri' je vole,
 Quand je ne puis voler je cours.

Je n'y fus qu'un jour et demi
 Que mon père m'envoya quêri
 Allons, etc.

Par mon frère le plus petit ;
 C'était pour me donner mari.
 Allons, etc.

C'était pour me donner mari,
 M'en a donné deux à choisir,
 Allons, etc.

M'a donné le père et le fils,
 Oh ! devinez lequel je pris.
 Allons, etc.

Je pris le père et le fils laissi,
Pour un p'tit d'argent que j'y vis,
Allons, etc.

Je voudrais qu'il fut un édit,
D'écorcher tous les vieux maris.
Allons, etc.

J'écorch'rais le mien tout en vie,
Port'rais sa peau vendre à Paris.
Allons, etc.

A deux liards la peau du chéti,
Encore prenez-la y'à crédit.
Allons, allons, allons, trétous,
Quand je ne puis couri' je vole,
Quand je ne puis voler je cours."

Luynes is one of a number of towns in France which have been rebaptised on falling into the hands of new lords. Formerly it was called Maillé, and belonged to a Comte de Maillé, till it was acquired by the Provençal adventurer, Charles Albert de Luynes, who became Constable of France in 1621 and enjoyed the favouritism of Louis XIII. Louis gave him this property and made him a duke.

The appearance of the castle is in the highest degree warlike and romantic. The façade it presents to the Loire is broken by a number of powerful round towers capped with pointed roofs, has few windows, and seems to frown and to command. Behind this front, however, is an elegant Renaissance wing. The house is in good preservation, and yet mellow, for, like Cheverny, it has had the rare advantage of having always been occupied, and its owner is the present bearer of the title, the Duc de Luynes. The village proper is at the foot of the castle, and consists of the cave-dwellings

in the cliff, mentioned above, and a "heart" formed by a number of old houses, most of which, like the hospital, date architecturally from the Renaissance. The church is more ancient, and has a Romanesque doorway. After the castle, however, the most singular monument in Luynes is a long range of ruined archways, some distance behind the town, the



The Château, Luynes

remains of a Gallo-Roman aqueduct which brought water to Tours from the springs of La Pie-noire.

The nearest railway station to Luynes on the line Paris-Nantes is Savonnières, a village on the Cher, reached from Luynes by a not much used ferry. A certain number of visitors, however, employ it—as I did—to enable them to go from Luynes to Villandry, near Savonnières, one of the least known but not least charming of the Loire châteaux. The huge palace has

suffered considerable changes, and almost the only part that remains in its original state is the high, square, fourteenth-century tower which dominates the whole pile.* The central block and the wings, though dating from the best epoch, 1540, have been disfigured by late eighteenth-century alterations, and the appearance of the house has been quite changed by formal terraces, balconies, and great vases in the classical style. Like Luynes, the château had an earlier name (before 1619)—Colombiers—under which it has its place in history, for the older fortress which it replaced was the spot where Henry II of England and Philip Augustus of France concluded peace in 1189.

The Park of Villandry, and its gardens, cover the lovely slopes above the Cher, which narrows its channel just above its confluence with the Loire opposite Cinq-Mars. From it the three châteaux, Langeais, Cinq-Mars, and Luynes, are visible, and the landscape is one of the richest and most distinguished in Touraine.

Savonnières itself (where the station is) is a delightful village on the Cher, which is broad here and divided by a *barrage*. It lurks under richly wooded slopes and has a church with an English-looking spire. The lions of the village now, as in Evelyn's day, who mentions them, are the *caves gouttières* (or dropping caves) which I did not examine.

From the little station of Savonnières I took train for Cinq-Mars, five miles off. This is a large village, quite an important centre of the wine trade, which, like Luynes, has many of its dwellings carved out of the cliff. Like Luynes also, it is memorable for its connection with a favourite of Louis XIII—Henri d'Effiat,

Marquis de Cinq-Mars—the ruins of whose château dominate the railway and the long village street. Cinq-Mars—whom one remembers chiefly as the hero of Alfred de Vigny's novel of that name, "read in schools"—must have been a less shrewd person even than the Duc de Luynes. He had the bad judgment to conspire with Gaston d'Orléans against Richelieu, whose protégé he was. Not content with having the young man's head cut off at Lyons in 1642, the Iron Cardinal dismantled Cinq-Mars castle as well, as an additional mark of infamy.

G. P. R. James' forgotten novel, "Richelieu," gives a vivid account of the conspiracy. On the whole the most perfidious part was played by Gaston d'Orléans—"Monsieur," brother of Louis XIII—whose peculiarity it always was in his conspiracies to sacrifice his friends. The brilliant death of Cinq-Mars and his friend, de Thou, arrested with him; his youth, wit, and personal comeliness, have combined to invest his personality with a strong romantic interest. He died, we are told, "with astoundingly great courage, and did not waste time in speechifying; he would not have his eyes bandaged, and kept them open when the blow was struck." Grand Equerry of France at nineteen, he was executed in his twenty-third year. The death of de Thou was, if anything, more courageous still; a courage, perhaps, in both cases, bred of a prodigious vanity.

Luckily Richelieu did his work of demolition so thoroughly that not even French restorers have restored Cinq-Mars. It is frankly a ruin, picturesque and stimulating like most ruins, and new constructions

have not deprived the site of all the interest of historical association. Two great crenellated towers on the side of a hill, irregularly pierced with windows, encircled by strong ramparts and flanked on one side by a wood, are all that now remain. They rise above the village very bold and fierce, and look across a great green plain—swept evidently by the Loire in its flood-times—out of which on the other side of the railway line rises a clump of dark trees of a great height. At the foot of these trees is a reedy swamp.

About a mile to the east of the village, on the cliff overlooking the Ile César, and opposite the *bec du Cher*, is the curious “Pile de Cinq-Mars.” This is a solid tower, ninety-five feet high and fifteen feet in diameter, topped with small pyramids at each angle, about which archæologists dispute with heat. Its origin is almost certainly Roman, and some have considered it to be a funeral monument, others a kind of lighthouse for vessels sailing up the river, to warn them of the embouchure of the Cher.

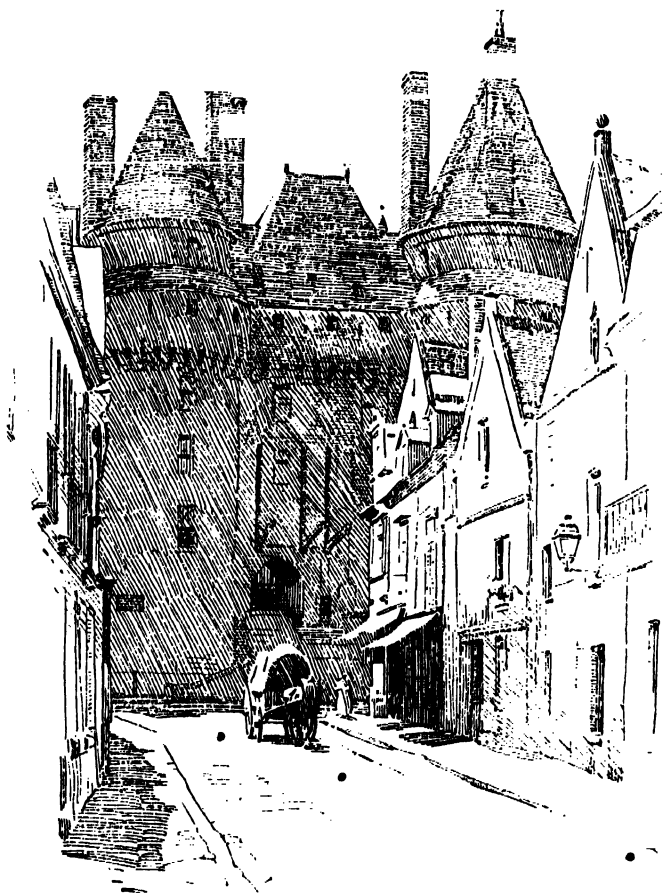
It hardly matters, for the old tower is certainly an admirable “feature” in a beautiful landscape.

The distance between Cinq-Mars and Langeais cannot be more than three miles, and even a slow train takes little longer than ten minutes in covering it. In that short space of time, however, or in far less, for the actual vision was gone in a few seconds, I passed through one of the most vivid emotions that I can remember. There are not many things quite so heady as colour. The sun, undisturbed by its efforts during the past month, was shining as serenely as ever, blazing down on the splendid landscape, making the white roads

whiter, the tree-trunks in shadow blacker, and the broad fields a more brilliant green. We came soon to a field of young corn, and as I looked out of the window at the distant Loire I found my eyes all at once dazzled by a sudden riot of colour: scarlet poppies and blue cornflowers, all in a setting of the brightest green. The effect of it was intoxicating, and instinctively one held one's breath. It was like some vivid picture by the most daring of post-impressionists, a picture that one was actually *in*. The headiness of it was almost suffocating, making one dizzy with a weird kind of sensuous delight.

Langeais attracts at once with its proper little square, its band-stand, and its neat houses, surrounding the fine château whose entrance is right in the middle of the town. The entrance gate, which opens between two beautiful towers with pointed "tops," supported by machicolated galleries, the other towers, the tall chimneys, and the steep slate-covered roofs combine to give the château a very picturesque air. The house was reconstructed in the middle of the sixteenth century by Jean Bourré on the site of an older fortress built by Pierre de la Brosse. This individual was a favourite of Philippe le Hardi, and the scandalous haste with which he enriched himself roused the resentment and jealousy of the other courtiers, who succeeded in getting him hanged for his frauds. Jean Bourré respected the main outlines of his predecessor's design, but grafted on to the fortress an elegant château in the taste of the Renaissance: a proceeding which gave the house originality and charm. It was reserved for M. Jacques Siegfried—of whom one must say nothing rash,

for he died in the odour of sanctity, having left the whole property, its grounds and contents, to the



The Château, Langeais

Institut de France—to restore the house back, at least in the interior, to the earlier style of Pierre de la Brosse. The chief historic interest that the château boasts

lies in the fact that it was here that Charles VIII wedded Anne of Brittany. The elaborate-patterned gardens on the south side of the house are remarkable.

The position (on the top of the cliff) which Langeais would naturally have occupied, is filled already by a still earlier stronghold—a rectangular donjon flanked with ramparts ; one of the earliest buildings of its kind which have survived in France. The donjon and ramparts are attributed to the Black Falcon, Foulques Nerra, great constructor of feudal fortresses, and 992 is said to be the year of its erection. These ruins are now in the park of the château, and from them one may look down at the little town clustering round the mansion, and at the church. The latter was begun in the eleventh century, and its beautiful belfry is attributed to the English, who are supposed to have built it during their occupation of the country, before the Maid turned them out of it.

Langeais has quite a considerable commercial activity. It is the centre for the rich territories of Les Varennes—"waste-lands" no longer. It has potteries and busy workshops, and is the market-town for the surrounding district ; while along the slopes of the hills, which, as far as St. Patrice, are separated now only by a narrow strip of alluvial ground from the river, the melons for which Langeais has long been famous (its arms are three melons), are successfully cultivated.

Opposite Rupuanne, where the first channel of the Indre joins the Loire, the line of hills turns inland and deserts the right bank of the river, and there begins a plain, growing wider and wider in extent, which stretches into the department of Maine-et-Loire, after

enshrining the little town of Bourgueil, and becomes the famous "Vallée d'Anjou." The door of this very rich, fertile district is at the village of St. Patrice, five and a half miles below Langeais, which is dominated by the château of Rochecotte. The interest of Rochecotte, which is a beautiful enough house, lies in its collection of relics and documents belonging to Talleyrand. The property was acquired by his niece, the late Duchesse de Dino, whose fascinating memoirs have recently been published in an English translation. In the park is a celebrated blackthorn which flowers in December. It is said that St. Patrick first worked the miracle when he passed through Rochecotte, and that the tree has repeated it every year since.

From St. Patrice to Bourgueil the main road, which turns inland, following the hill, is little more than one long straggling village inhabited by vine-dressers. And the other routes along the river-side are equally populous. All under the *levée* which protects the country between St. Patrice and Port-Boulet, from the Loire, are hamlets, connected by ferries with *les Varennes*, the waste-lands traversed by the Indre. The population of these lowlands—through which wander the old channel of the Cher, and the Indre, protected by huge banks from the floods of the Loire—are a distinct and interesting race. The cultivation of the hemp which forms the wealth of the district seems to have had its effect on the inhabitants. They lack altogether the gaiety of the vine-dressers and fruit-growing peasants who live on the higher ground ; a fact which may perhaps be due to the damp, rather feverish nature of their climate. The dwellers in the Varennes, particularly those of Bréhé-

mont and the neighbouring villages of Liguères and la Chapelle-aux-Naux, are the butt of the more pleasantly placed *vignerons*. When these want to insult a man and call him a fool they say, "Il est de Bréhémont."

The spade is the indispensable instrument for the inhabitants of the Varennes, and with it they dig over the fertile fields in which is grown the finest hemp in



The Loire at Port-Boulet,

France. The ground is divided up into the tiniest plots, not large enough to allow the use of the plough. The spade, therefore, is necessary, and it is very large and of a peculiar shape, which demands a specially heavy *sabot*, so soon does its "shoulder" wear a groove. This *sabot* is only worn in the fields, which is the reason why the peasant is seen walking to work bearing, in addition to the heavy spade, a trident, on the teeth

of which the wooden shoes are stuck. Other and lighter *sabots* form the ordinary footgear; but in order not to wear these out the peasants often prefer to walk barefooted, carrying them in their hands. The fine sand of the soil renders this not unpleasant. The women of the district are not less hard-working than the men. “Elles se tuent à force de travailler,” says the authority from whom these facts are taken. “Elles bêchent, s’en vont *queri* au loin et portent sur leur dos toute la nourriture de leurs vaches, fourrages ou racines. Au point du jour, on les voit partir, en jupe courte, sur le dos une hotte, à la main un lourd bâton qui joue un rôle considerable. Sans ce bâton, la paysanne des Varennes ne serait pas complète. C’est son aide indispensable. Quand la hotte est chargée d’herbes fraîches, de navets et de choux, il ne serait pas facile de se lever. La paysanne saisit alors son bâton, s’appuyant dessus à la façon de primates, et, s’agenouillant, parvient, à se relever grâce à cet appui. La hotte a survécu alors que les autres traditions disparaissaient. Seules, les femmes d’un certain âge ont conservé l’ample manteau à capuchon, rabattu sur les yeux, jadis d’un usage si général. Cependant les jeunes filles ont encore l’habitude de se voiler la face avec du tulle noir, les jours de communion. Elles ont gardé aussi leur coquette coiffure, véritable monument composé d’un serre-tête, d’une bande de dentelle de prix et d’une coiffe.” •

This lace band is the only luxury that these people of the lowlands allow themselves. They feed badly and seldom eat meat save on Shrove Tuesday, when their practice is to gorge themselves with a quantity that would have satisfied Gargantua—whose creator was

born not so very far away. And some of their favourite jokes seem to show a rough humour whose quality is not unlike that of Rabelais.

The ferry which took me across the Loire to this curious district of the Varennes enabled me to walk to the village of Rigny, to see one of the last of the "châteaux de la Loire," that of Ussé. Though not actually on the Loire, but on the Indre, it seemed too near to miss. It would have been a mistake to have missed it. You reach the house up a noble avenue of poplars which opens a long vista in front of the Ile Ste. Barbe. The château is a very charming place, a curious medley of towers, turrets, pointed roofs, and dormer windows surmounted by stone pinnacles. Its proprietors have added to it through successive ages the embellishments peculiar to their time ; and these have not been swept away by stern-featured restorers. Perhaps the most beautiful part of the building is the north façade, facing the Cour d'Honneur—a fine example of sixteenth-century architecture, with elegant stone shafts rising up, between all the windows, to end in a carved stone pinnacle standing on either side of the dormers. One of the pavilions, and the terraces above the Indre, are the work (surely a gentle form of relaxation) of Vauban, Louis XIV's great fortress builder, whose elder daughter married M. de Valentinay, the then owner of the property. There is not much of interest inside the château, though it has good chimney-pieces and a fine Grand Staircase. The hill which forms the background to Ussé is covered with fruit-trees which stretch as far to the west as the outskirts of the forest of Chinon.

So there was no escaping it after all ; Chinon would

have to be seen, too ! A circular tour seemed obvious. There was Azay-le-rideau close at hand, and from Azay a geometrically straight highway led to Chinon, whence the train would bring me back to Port-Boulet, or the road carry me through Candès and Montsoreau to Saumur.

Azay-le-rideau turned out to be a charming little town set in one of the most smiling *paysages* of Touraine, with something over two thousand inhabitants and a pleasant inn, the "Grand Monarque." Its Renaissance château, which for some years past has been the property of the State, was built by a wealthy treasurer-general of finances in the reign of François I, called Gilles Berthelot. It is elegant rather than large, and extremely attractive. It has two big crenellated towers, joined to one another by a *corps de logis* and a principal façade, which are elaborately ornamented. Inside there is a good collection of furniture, with some pictures, of which the most interesting is a portrait of Gabrielle d'Estrées with her children. The beautiful mistress of Henry of Navarre is shown nude to the waist, by the side of a table on which is a plate of fruit. Her hair is elaborately dressed, and there are two rings on a finger of her left hand. Her children are in the background, the youngest in the arms of a wet-nurse, and there is a far view of a maid in the distant kitchen and of some trees through a tiny square of window above the nurse's head. In the portrait, the fair Gabrielle has a curious, grave, inscrutable face. The forehead is broad and white, the eyebrows high and not pronounced, the eyes small, but almond-shaped and dark. They seem to look

down her nose, which is a trifle long; a fact which gives an impression faintly sinister. The mouth is the most puzzling of her features. It is firm, but has possibilities of humour which the gravity of the eyes seems to belie. The chin is round and firm and gives the face great shapeliness. The beauty of the displayed neck and bosom justifies either the vanity of the sitter or the enterprise of the painter—whichever was responsible for the curious semi-nudity of the pose.

The park surrounding the château is extremely well kept, and borders the Indre, whose valley unrolls itself towards Ussé with a soft graciousness.

From Azay the straightest of straight roads stretches for the longest dozen miles that I can remember, across the flat expanses of the Varennes, to Chinon. I could not restrain a slight tremor of excitement as I approached Chinon. It was a place beloved by our own Henry II, who died here in 1189. It stood a year's siege against Philip Augustus of France in 1204-5; and finally, was it not at Chinon that la Lorraine sought Charles VII at the beginning of her fateful mission? The town stretches along the banks of the Vienne, nine miles above its junction with the Loire. It is a considerable place, with more than six thousand people, and its fine hotel, which occupies the buildings of a monastery, is greatly frequented by English and American tourists. The château, whose remains—a long line of ramparts divided off by towers—make a noble appearance on a high plateau above the town, commands the valley of the Vienne. It consists really of three distinct castles, the château de St. Georges, the château du Milieu, and the château du Coudray. Of the

château de St. Georges, built by Henry II of England (where he died, muttering "Shame on a beaten King!"), only some foundations remain. The château du Milieu, begun in the eleventh century on the site of an old Roman fort, has suffered from frequent restorations, but is the one which most repays an inspection. The chief points are the dungeon (the part best preserved), the Pavillon de l'Horloge at the entrance, and the Grand Logis, in the hall of which the meeting between Joan of Arc and Charles VII is supposed to have taken place. The third part, the château du Coudray, is connected with the château du Milieu by a bridge which crosses the deep separating moat. It is composed of two round towers and a third tower of great beauty, with, on the left, a thirteenth-century chapel. The ruins of Chinon are the property of the State, and the plateau on which they stand has been turned into a public walk.

From the quays by the side of the broad Vienne the appearance of the castle is altogether admirable: a very long line of ramparts, with tall towers here and there, set in a frame of trees, with the long white town underneath them. Chinon, among all its memories, has one which is particularly dear to me. In it or near it (for Seuilley disputes the honour) the ever-youthful Rabelais was born about the year 1495.

I decided not to return by the railway, after all, to Port-Boulet and Chouzé-sur-Loire, but following, on its western bank, the course of the Vienne, to see Candès (where the Vienne joins the Loire) and Montsoreau, its neighbour.

It was a lovely road, with beautiful manors all the way, under heights, covered with fruit trees

or dotted with windmills. At the village of St. Germain-sur-Vienne the banks of the river are covered with ducks, *tirons* and *tirettes*, the *tirons* being the males. St. Germain is yet another village claiming to be Rabelais' birthplace. The hill that commands it is surmounted by a rocky cliff, riddled with dwellings and covered by



Candès

houses, while underneath the hill is its very ancient church. After St. Germain comes the Ile Boiret, a long narrow island consisting of meadows bordered by alders. Then, where the great tributary joins the main waterway, Candès smiles high up amid its terraced gardens and surveys the meeting. Candès has a great church, which has the appearance almost of a fortress,

built on the site of the cell in which St. Martin died. All that the restorers with their bright white stonework could do to destroy its venerable appearance, has, needless to say, been done. There is also a château here which was at times the residence of Charles VII and Louis XI ; it is now practically in ruins.

Below Candès and further on, is Montsoreau, on the Loire, which, although it really forms one town with Candès, is, like Fontevrault, which lies further to the south, within the borders of the province of Anjou.

Montsoreau is a white-faced village of about five hundred people, whose old houses, all mellow and rose-covered, are dominated by the remains of a great château. Originally the river ran immediately at the castle foot, but the high road, from which the château rises abruptly, now separates them. The Loire is here immensely wide, and has a savage appearance, given it by its great sand-banks. The castle, in the seventeenth century and earlier, served as the rendezvous for a swarm of titled robbers, whose exactions from the voyagers up and down the Vienne and the Loire remained a standing source of annoyance to the district until the days when Richelieu could veil his policy beneath a semblance of benevolence and relieve the river trade by crushing the feudal rights. Externally, on the side facing the river, the château presents a solid stretch of masonry, high and massive, and with a very proud air, flanked on either side by two crumbling towers. Inside, in the *cour d'honneur*, now much disfigured, there is a lovely turret containing the staircase, decorated with delicate arabesques and fantastic mouldings, and still used by the various families of labourers and *vignerons* who have

taken up their abode in different parts of the huge building. Some of its great halls are used as cellars and warehouses, and odd-shaped windows have been knocked in the walls of others, which have been divided up into dwelling-rooms. The unrestored, *déclassé* state of the château made it immensely evocative of the past, more so than many of the more frequented, elaborate and historic places that I had visited. Dumas laid the scene of one of his stories here : "La Dame de Montsoreau." From Montsoreau a tramway takes you to Saumur along the river-side, or inland, along a pretty road, to Fontevrault.

Fontevrault is a sad place—in the middle of lovely forest country—which centres round its huge abbey, now used as a prison. The abbey of Fontevrault was the most illustrious of all the religious houses in France. It was both a monastery and a nunnery, with an abbess at the head of each part ; it numbered royal princesses among its abbesses, and its church, the "Grand Moutier," still holds the mutilated tombs of the Plantagenets, among them those of Henry II and of Richard the Lion Heart. In spite of the dismal prison atmosphere of the abbey buildings it is impossible for an Englishman to remain quite unmoved on ground so intimately connected with our history.

I returned rather sadly to Montsoreau. After Montsoreau the tram skirts the river, passing the village of Turquant, where some of the best Saumur wine is made, till its ten-mile journey is completed, and the ample, surprising town of Saumur greets the traveller's delighted gaze.

CHAPTER XVIII

SAUMUR TO ANGERS

SAUMUR is ancient and spacious; probably few places of about seventeen thousand people take up so much room, and give such an impression of importance. It is arranged, too, as though by a scenic artist, entirely for effect. The Orléans Railway station is on the right bank of the river, and anyone arriving by train must be struck with the imposing appearance of the town from the bridge. The electric trams that cross and recross (at not too frequent intervals) lend an additional note of deception. To the left stretches a line of hills crowned with windmills, usually at work. These steep slopes end in the massive yellow keep of King René's castle. All round the foot of the castle the old streets and houses cluster; along the river front is a stately line of tall houses and pleasant rows of trees, while on the right-hand side of the bridge the sharp spire of a church outlines itself against the sky. Saumur gives a great impression of length.

The river is very broad just here, and between the Orléans station and the town proper is a long island, called l'Ile d'Or. The great road which crosses by two stone bridges to Saumur and traverses the town with absolute inflexibility, is bordered all the way with tall houses, except on the actual bridges. The houses built

on the island are known collectively as the Faubourg des Ponts. This island has unexpected historic interest. It seems, for one thing, always to have been there, and Loire islands are usually perishable; and it contains the remains of a château built by the good King René of Anjou in the middle of the fifteenth century, for his daughter. It was here, too, under the patronage of King René, that there sprang up a little independent republic of fishermen and labourers. They kept themselves quite apart (as the *Hortillons* of Amiens do still), were hardy, independent workers, impatient of any kind of control save that of their elected chief, who was chosen to preserve their privileges against aggression, and to settle domestic disputes. They seem to have been neither a contentious nor a discontented community. "Mock coronations, laughing processions, bright gatherings of men and maidens, gaily went on all the summer in the little island," says one authority, adding that "even in the days of Louis XVI, an old sailor in the French fleet bore as his proudest title that of 'Roi de la République de l'Ile d'Or.'"

At the end of the bridge, after crossing the little island, you come into Saumur by the "Place de la Bilange." On your left is a theatre built in 1864, apparently by an admirer of the Odéon; and behind it is the sixteenth-century Hôtel de Ville. But the quaintest part of the town, the only quarter indeed in which an idea of the old Huguenot Saumur can be obtained, is away from the quays, and away from the broad roads on the right of the rue d'Orléans, the great highway that traverses the town. It is to be found in the narrow streets at the foot of the hill on which the castle stands, and

also round the Romanesque church of Notre-Dame-de-Nantilly, further back. In the seventeenth century, Saumur was a great stronghold of Protestantism, under the Governorship of Duplessis-Mornay, the famous "Pape des Huguenots," and was the seat of a large Protestant university. After the revocation of the



Saumur

Edict of Nantes, however, in 1685, it lost 25,000 of its inhabitants. This crushing blow may account for its undue size nowadays, in proportion to its inhabitants. Certainly the town did not begin to recover in prosperity from this disaster until after the arrival of the corps of "Carabiniers du Monsieur," in 1763. For these troops, five years later, a school of horsemanship was founded—origin of the present world-famous Ecole de Cavalerie,

in the large barracks facing the rue Beaurepaire. The presence of the big Cavalry school, where officers in the most fashionable French regiments receive their training, has made Saumur one of the places where Society spends both its time and its money. The roads in the neighbourhood of the school are spacious, and bordered with comfortable houses, while the incessant passing to and fro of men on horseback and smartly-dressed women, gives them great animation. A long, tree-shaded avenue leading to the little affluent of the Loire, the Thouet, is a very favourite "Row"; the rich yellow-green of the acacias, and the men on horseback in bright uniforms, riding under their shade, might almost cause it to be mistaken for a corner of the Bois. This elegant suburb is certainly very different from the old quarter near the castle, in one of whose steep and narrow roads, remarkable for "la sonorité de son petit pavé caillouteux," lived, as all lovers of Balzac will remember, Eugénie Grandet, the daughter of the miserly old *tonnelier*. The château itself, like anything in which that versatile artist King René had a hand, is placed admirably for effect on the sharp promontory which commands the junction of the Thouet with the Loire. It has lately been bought by the town, restored, and turned into the inevitable Musée, and there is no need to examine it closely. A building with a splendid position in a landscape, as someone has pointed out, always disappoints on near inspection. It has been the scene, however, of some striking events. Here was scored one of the principal successes of the Royalists of La Vendée in 1793, under Larochejacquelin. The rebels forced the garrison to surrender, insisting quaintly that

each Republican soldier should submit to being shaved on one side of his head before he was allowed to go free.

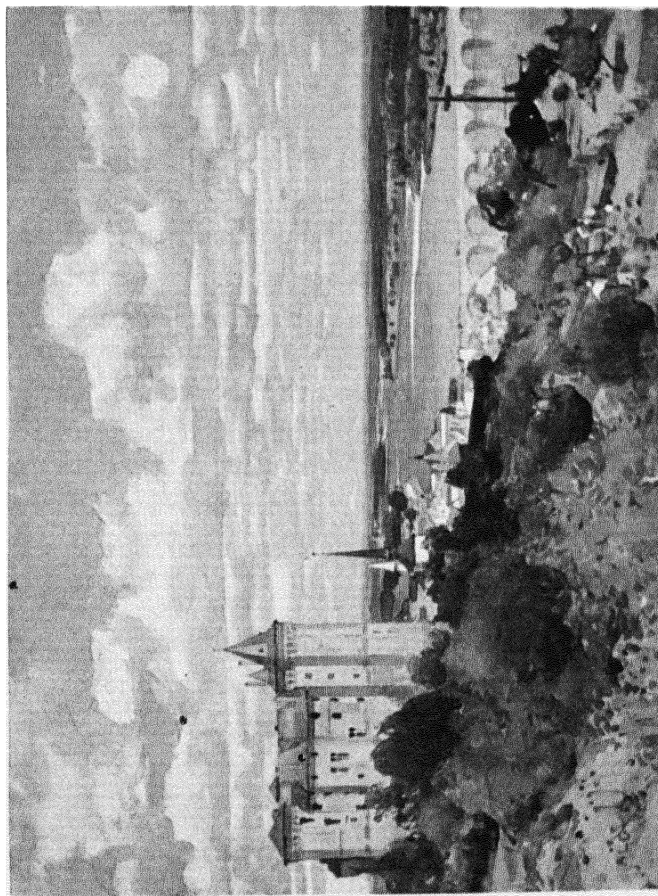
If one continues to follow the steep ascent which winds up round the castle, one finds oneself very soon on the "Butte des Moulins," among the celebrated wind-mills of Saumur. The view is admirable; a prospect which Turner might have painted, and probably did, during his sketching tour down the Loire in 1828. At the foot of the hill swells the dome of Notre Dame des Ardilliers, which owes its completion to the repentance of Mme. de Montespan. Near by it is the modest "Villa des Jaguencaux," which was inhabited by the discarded favourite who, too old now really to enjoy anything but the consolations of the spirit, gave herself up to devotion, and to the severest mortification of the flesh; varied by the compilation of her memoirs. Incidentally, she must have had a good deal to repent of, if there is any truth in the stories of the Black Masses which she had performed on her person in the vain endeavour to retain, through the Devil's agency, her hold on the affections of the Grand Monarque. On the whole, however, her repentance was probably more an evidence of deep chagrin and exacerbation at being defeated by Madame de Maintenon than of religious feeling or fear for her soul. It must indeed have been trying for a haughty and passionate woman—"a majestic beauty, with hair dressed in a thousand ringlets," who, always kept herself in the limelight while she was in favour, who bullied the poor Queen, and lived so magnificently that she was able to lose and win back four million francs in one night at *bassette*—to see herself supplanted in the King's affection by an elderly and

devout widow whom she had engaged as governess for their children !

To return to the Butte des Moulins: the hill itself was called "Murus" in Gallo-Roman times; and this "salvus murus" was a final refuge from attack. It is completely honeycombed with burrows, of human construction. As I had noticed in my walk from Chinon, and eight-mile tram journey from Montsoreau, the villages all the way are largely composed of grottoes cut out of the solid rock, their chimneys and openings appearing picturesquely among the greenery. The hills flanking the river are covered with vines, which yield the white *vin mousseux* for which the district is famous.

The neighbourhood of Saumur is rich in megalithic monuments, and it is a curious fact that these monuments are all to be found on the left bank of the Loire, and on the two banks of the Thouet. South of the town, across the bridge (Pont Fouchard) over the Thouet near Bagneux, is the famous Dolmen de Bagneux or Grand Dolmen, the largest of its kind in France.

So striking was Saumur in a purely spectacular way, that I have little recollection of anything else save a meal that was a disappointment, and some wine of the district which suggested that Saumur was the last place in the world at which to drink "Saumur." I spent only a night in the town, and left on the following morning by the broad highway on the left bank, for St. Rémy, where I intended to cross the bridge to St. Mathurin and make for les Ponts-de-Cé, going first (to sleep) to Angers. It was a good twenty-mile tramp to St. Mathurin, through a constant succession of villages nestling under vine-clad hills, and rich with beautiful examples of mediaeval



SAUMUR.

architecture. The right bank, on which the railway runs absolutely straight, through *varennés*—touching only les Rosiers, St. Mathurin, and Trelazé (where the large slate quarries are) before reaching Angers—is far less interesting.

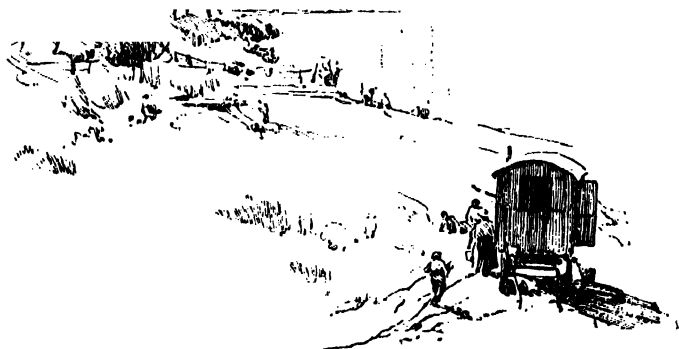
The first place outside Saumur that I reached was St. Hilaire St. Florent, a long town of over two thousand people, shut in between the left bank of the Thouet, and a picturesque hill which separates it from the Loire. This part of the journey can be accomplished by the electric train that starts from the Orléans station. Of the once celebrated abbey of St. Florent only a few buildings, dating from the seventeenth century and restored and added to in the nineteenth, still remain. The town is a centre of the Saumur wine industry, and Ackermann-Laurance and other firms have here immense cellars carved in the hillside, out of the solid rock. After St. Florent the road draws near the Loire again, crossing the Thouet just before it debouches into the main stream. It runs now once more at the foot of pleasant hills, not, however, so abrupt as those between Montsoreau and Saumur. The beauty and interest of this stretch of country are very great, and it seems to be well out of the beaten track for tourists. At Chênehuttes-Tuffeaux, the first village after St. Florent, are some interesting remains of a sixteenth-century priory joined to a little Romanesque church. At Trêves, a mile or two further on, there was another Romanesque church, and a fine castle, consisting of two towers, one round and one square, built by Pierre le Maçon on the site of an earlier fortress erected by the redoubtable Black Falcon, Foulques Nerra, who built so many strongholds in the

Loire valley. A mile further is Cunault, with a much-restored but very fine "Plantagenet" church, containing some mural paintings of great interest, and columns with two hundred elaborately carved capitals. The tower is highly ornamented, and topped with a pointed spire of stone.

After two more miles I reached Gennes, a village surrounded by the remains of a once important Roman town. At Gennes too, those who love them may study the celebrated Dolmens. From the top of the steep hill above the village the view stretches far over the low-lying *varennés* of the right bank, the fertile Vallée d'Anjou, as far as the old town of Beaufort, which still wears a strongly feudal air, and lies at the foot of some low hills.

Gennes is about a dozen miles from Saumur, and after leaving it behind one comes very soon to the remains of the famous abbey of St. Maur—a line of ancient walls rising from the river-bank. The abbey was founded in the sixth century by St. Maur, who, in the eighteenth century, gave his name to a celebrated congregation of Benedictines, who possessed a number of important houses, of which this was one of the chief. Of the ancient abbey, besides the walls seen from the Loire, there remains a building of the seventeenth century, and above it, half-way up the hill, a twelfth-century chapel built on the actual foundations of the sanctuary where St. Maur died and was buried. The abbey was suppressed by the Revolutionaries, but restored by the Benedictines in 1890. They were again sent packing by M. Combes in 1903. The village is joined by a ferry to La Menitré, a little centre for the rich agricultural

industry of a district which is one of the most fertile and highly cultivated in France. It recalls memories—like so many villages in Anjou—of the good King René, king of half a dozen places and yet without a kingdom, whose amiable personality has left such an indelible mark on the many places where he lived or stayed.



• The Loire at Gennes

Below St. Maur and La Ménitré we come to the village of St. Rémy-la-Varenne, with a restored church and the remains of a priory which contains an elaborately carved and painted chimney-piece. The road here crosses the river by a long suspension bridge to St. Mathurin, which has a modern church, boasting fine stalls and carved woodwork, said to have come from the abbey of St. Maur.

The Loire below Gennes becomes for a while narrower, deeper, and more powerful, before spreading itself again among the islands of St. Rémy-la-Varenne. Soon after St. Rémy the hills abruptly leave the river-bank, and the stream runs between low-lying borders in the middle of a positive labyrinth of islands and islets before passing under the arches of les Ponts-de-Cé.

At St. Mathurin, late in the evening, I got into the train, tired out, and left the Loire, to rattle through an odd district, all scarred with slate mines, into "black Angers." At black Angers I slept.

I was *so* tired that, in the morning, I refused to get up before luncheon. The idea of having to explore Angers, a mere "big town," after having passed joyously down sunny village streets, with the great yellow river swirling along by my side far quicker than I could run, was in the last degree wearisome. I had been along a road that made you sing as you walked; under green slopes rich with vines; by ruined castles, and beneath the shadow of queer churches. I had wandered through a land free from tourists with guide-books in their hands; where you could pleasantly drink your bottle of wine in the sunlight. And here I was at Angers—the home of the Plantagenets: a place steeped in associations, with hundreds of things to see in it, no doubt. How tiresome it all sounded! It was very hard to get up, even to eat. To make things worse, the fine days of which I had had such a long succession, seemed from the dismal state of the sky to have ceased for ever. I undid my bag, pulled out my seldom-consulted Baedeker and lay back on the pillow to read about Angers. It was ancient and

prosperous I discovered, possessed 77,164 inhabitants, and was situated on the navigable river Maine, five miles above its confluence with the Loire. "Angers," the account continues, "was formerly very badly built and was known as the 'Black Town,' on account of its sombre appearance, but in the nineteenth century it underwent an almost complete transformation. Its ancient ramparts were replaced by handsome boulevards, adjoined by modern suburbs, new streets were opened up, others were widened and straightened, and numerous large edifices, quays, and bridges were constructed." Alas, this was deplorable! I had come to know those "handsome boulevards," those "modern suburbs" of the second-rate provincial city. At Angers they were more dismal than I had thought possible. Even French "restoration," which preserves the plan of the original, is to be preferred to this passion for substituting broad, stupid boulevards and "large edifices" for buildings with charm and character which less drastic measures would easily render healthy and safe. In the middle of the town is a specimen of what in other parts has been ruthlessly destroyed to make way for the "edifices"—the tall, half-timbered house with five overhanging stories, known as the Maison d'Adam. This beautiful fifteenth-century dwelling is at the corner of a little square; its dark, carved woodwork is most elaborate and interesting. The cathedral of St. Maurice, in which I sheltered during a sudden, most ferocious downpour, seemed very grand and simple—a twelfth-century nave, without aisles and, oddly enough, without either triforium or clerestory. Its west front is good, and makes a fine effect, as you approach it up

the Montée St. Maurice, with its twin tapering spires and the elaborate carving of its façade, above the pointed archway of the door.

But the great "sight" of Angers, which seems to dwarf the whole town by its hugeness, is the sombre castle. This vast fortress stands above the Maine, on a foundation of solid rock; it is perhaps still, as Baedeker remarks, "one of the most imposing buildings of the kind in existence." It was built chiefly in the thirteenth century, and in shape resembles a pentagon. It had originally seventeen huge round towers, many of which have now been destroyed. Those that remain are joined together by curtains of venerable masonry. Its moat has been filled in, and on the south side one of its bastions has been swept away to make room for a boulevard. This great *donjon*—which looks most overpowering, perhaps, from the bridge—like many of the same period and style, is one which should be observed from the outside. Inside, it is used for storing ammunition, and contains some very ugly modern buildings and nothing to see. Just in front of the castle, in the place d'Anjou, at the point where the Boulevard du Château meets the Boulevard du Roi René, is a small bronze statue of King René, by the celebrated sculptor, David D'Angers.

Of the amusements which Angers may have to offer to the jaded voyager, though I regard myself as something of an amateur of such things, as far as French towns are concerned, I yet cannot speak. There was no performance at the large theatre which looks on to the "Place du Ralliement"; and the incessant rain made the town uninviting as far as exploration was concerned.

No doubt the Jardin du Mail in front of the Hôtel de Ville, which has a bandstand in the middle of it, and the broad and shady boulevards de la Maine and de Saumur, are pleasant enough when there is sun or moon to light them. That melancholy evening, with the rain falling in large drops from the leaves and branches, they did not entice to anything save *felo de se*. However, Angers has one great virtue—it specialises in the manufacture of liqueurs made of the black-heart cherry, a fruit which is grown in the surrounding districts in great quantities. Between St. Mathurin and les Ponts-de-Cé the villages are nearly smothered in cherry trees whose white blossom, in the springtime, is said to be a rare and unforgettable sight. The island between the Thouet and the Loire is like a great orchard. Guignolet is the chief liqueur made at Angers, and according to the legend it was invented in the Middle Ages by the nuns of a Benedictine convent. I do not know whether this is the case, or whether M. Cointreau invented the liqueur and one of his travellers the anecdote; I can only assert that Guignolet has its good points. But all liqueurs have a fascination for me which I cannot attempt to disguise. Guignolet I have never tasted before or since, yet to me it and Angers are synonymous, and the one almost enables me to forgive the other for being what Mr. James has called “done up” and, in the same passage, “stupidly and vulgarly modernised.” .

CHAPTER XIX

THE VALLÉE D'ANJOU

WHEN a large town is dull or depressing there is always the electric tramway to fall back on. More for my vow's sake, seeing that it was a town on the Loire, than because I had any particular knowledge of the place or hopefulness with regard to it, I took, on the second morning after my arrival at Angers, the tramcar to les Ponts-de-Cé, the ancient Pons Sarii of the Romans.

This little town of between three and four thousand people lies about three miles to the south of Angers, and, perhaps as a sign that piety deserves to be rewarded, the nearer I got to it the brighter became the weather, and I arrived in a triumphant burst of sunshine. The aspect of the place is original; it is quite a unique and satisfactory little town, and spreads itself across the river, bordering a straight, interminable highway. The Loire here is like an arm of the sea; it is two miles wide and studded with islands. The town is built on three of them connected with either bank, and with each other, by a series of bridges, which have in all one hundred and nine arches.

At one end of the midmost of the islands on which the place is built, l'Ile Forte, is the castle of King René (the number of whose castles must run well into

three figures). It is an octagonal tower whose slated roof is supported by a machicolated gallery. In spite of the many batterings it has received in the various struggles in which it has played its part—particularly in 1620, when the Royal troops under Créqui met here the partisans of Marie de Médicis; and in 1793, when the army of the Convention met the Royalists of la



Les Ponts-de-Cé

Vendée—it still remains remarkably solid and strong. The town, until the coming of the railway and the multiplication of bridges, had a great strategic importance.

Its warlike past, dating certainly from Roman times, is now, however, forgotten in the rush for *matelôte*, for les Ponts-de-Cé is the favourite airing-place on fine holidays for the people of Angers, and it has many pleasant cafés, with shady gardens, where the favourite fish stew of tench or shad can be indulged in.

In this respect les Ponts-de-Cé is to Angers what the banks of the Loiret and la Chapelle St. Mesmin are to Orléans.

Between les Ponts-de-Cé and the embouchure of the Maine, the country is studded with hamlets. On the right bank is St. Gemmes rising in the shape of an amphitheatre up the slopes of a camp of Julius Cæsar ; on the left are the villages of Murs and of St. Jean de la Croix. Near here, at la Roche-de-Murs, a high cliff overlooking the Louet, one of the branches of the Loire, occurred one of the most dramatic incidents in the bloody war of la Vendée. A battalion of Republican soldiers left to guard this position was surrounded and cut off by the Royalists. They were summoned to surrender, but rather than do so they all threw themselves from the top of the cliff into the Louet, shouting "Vive la République !" Among them was a woman, the wife of an officer, to whom the Royalists offered her life. She, however, preferred to throw herself and her children into the river with the others. •

The stretch of river between les Ponts-de-Cé and Nantes is one of such surpassing interest and beauty that it can only be seen properly by making the descent in a boat. A whole summer might be rapturously spent in exploring its hundreds of backwaters, its winding arms and *boires*, its innumerable little-known but interesting towns and villages. There is not much in the guide-books to call attention to a district, one of whose charms is perhaps that it is so "undiscovered." Not having a boat available, I was forced to go awkwardly from point to point, missing a good deal that would have been revealed to a canoeist, and I can indeed

only mention briefly the principal towns and villages on either bank.

At the mouth of the Maine, on the right bank of the Loire, is the gleaming white village of la Pointe, facing a wide sheet of water. Below it on the same side is Savonnières—famous for its wines—which has also a station; and la Possonière. The little town of St. Georges-sur-Loire and the château de Serrant lie a mile or two inland.

There is still a good deal of water-traffic between Nantes and Angers; when improvements have been carried out and something done towards regularising the course of the Loire, this will no doubt largely increase. Until quite recently a regular service of passenger steamers ran between the two towns, the landing-stage of the steamers at Angers being just under the castle. La Pointe looks across to a great low island opposite, formed by the Louet, which is very highly cultivated. On the right bank, beyond the village, rocky hills rise cliff-like from the river, giving the landscape a "note" of magnificence. The occasional appearance of a small ship coming up under sail towards Angers lends a new excitement now to the river—brings a thrill from the still distant sea, which is delicious to English travellers who have been, for long, further away from it than they can ever get in their own small island. Some of the rocks about here are very curious; there is one in particular, a sharp, projecting spur which curiously resembles an obelisk. Beyond the cliffs, that is to say above them, at the back, the land is planted with vines. Here are the great *crus* of Anjou, of which the chief is the Coulée de Serrant on part of the estate surrounding

the celebrated château de Serrant. This house, which lies to the south of the highway from Angers to Nantes, about a mile from the little town of St. Georges-sur-Loire, is a magnificent example of the Renaissance château, enclosed in a huge park. It is composed of three rectangular wings flanked at the outside angles by two beautiful towers surmounted by domes. The château is surrounded by large moats filled with water and in good preservation. The northern tower and those parts of the house which adjoin it, were built in 1546, from designs by Philibert Delorme; the southern tower and most of the remainder of the house were built in 1636. The chapel dates also from the seventeenth century, and is the work of Mansard. The whole fabric has lately been very carefully restored. In 1661 Guillaume Bautru, who owned the estate at that time, received here the "Grand Monarque." In 1755 it became the property of an Irishman named James Walsh, related to the Jacobite merchant of Nantes who in 1745 provided the Young Pretender with the ship which carried him to Scotland. James Walsh's descendant, the Duc de la Trémoille, now owns it.

St. Georges-sur-Loire, which is situated along the highway to the south-east of Serrant, contains two beautiful seventeenth-century buildings, remains of its abbey, and a church of the same date. Five miles further on towards Ancenis is Champtocé, a village at the bottom of a valley, dominated by the ruins of a castle which has a sinister name merely because it belonged to Gilles de Retz, though the Bluebeard of the fairy story never actually lived there. It is hardly

worth a visit, however, in a land so stocked with ruined castles as Anjou, and the traveller bent on seeing the Loire will see more of it by turning off due south, at St. Georges, and following the road which leads across the river to Chalonnes. Just before Chalonnes is a perfect archipelago of islands, as highly cultivated as gardens, and studded with hamlets and villages. The Loire is split up by them into a number of branches of which some keep the swiftness of the river's current, others seem to sleep like stagnant lakes. These still backwaters, which are frequently formed in the lower reaches of the river, almost as far down as St. Nazaire, are known as *boires*.

Chalonnes is situated at the embouchure of two canalised affluents of the Loire, the Layon and the Louet. A word here should be said for the calm and tranquil Louet, pleasantest of the branches of the Loire, which takes its gentle way bordered and overhung on either side by beautiful trees, amid green pasture-lands and at the foot of peaceful villages. Here, indeed, is a paradise awaiting the soft splash of the exploring canoeist's paddle; here in its fullness is Du Bellay's "Douceur Angévine."

Before the decay of navigation on the river, Chalonnes was a place of some importance on account of its coal-mines. These are still worked, but the yield is not a large one. The population of the place has sunk from about six to about four thousand people. In front of the town the Loire is divided into four arms separated by islands and crossed by a line of suspension bridges a mile and a half long.

At Chalonnes begins, on the left bank, some of the

finest scenery of the lower Loire. The rocks rise straight up from the river, their summits often covered with houses; in one place an old watch-tower seems to guard the channel. The lesser arm of the river runs at the base of these cliffs, which further on are crowned by a green, luxuriant wood. Behind them stretch the vineyards. Then suddenly the aspect of the landscape changes. The rocky wall is broken by a valley, enclosed by pleasant hills covered with villages and topped by numerous windmills. It is a delightful corner, unlike Anjou even to the roofs of the houses, which—in spite of their proximity to the slate quarries of Angers—are red-tiled and flat, like those in the Vclay. At the bottom of the valley enormous lime-kilns lend a touch of the grotesque not altogether displeasing. Some of them, abandoned, overgrown and ruinous, have a human interest which many feudal keeps might envy. I must confess to being unable to pass a deserted “works,” factory, or furnace without a thrill. Here—so obviously—men toiled; and with what apparent futility! I can think of nothing that is a more grim reminder of the transitory nature of human life than a deserted forge or ruinous factory chimney.

The furnaces still at work show plenty of signs of life in the streams of smoke which escape from their chimneys, and their presence has the advantage of making the river near here much more animated than it otherwise would be. Vessels are moored at the foot of each works, loading or unloading their cargoes. Beautiful sailing-ships come upstream, stately, like great white birds, while others slide down with the current, their masts lowered.

The view from here towards the port of Montjean,

backed by its great cliff, is very fine, and the large group of lime-kilns looks in the distance, as Ardouin-Dumazet observes, like a great fortress. Montjean is nowadays the port of the Loire which lies furthest inland. The population of the place—over three thousand—consists almost entirely of seamen. The little port is commanded and half crushed by the steep hill against which it shelters and on the top of which



Montjean

stands its noble church. On the opposite bank across a broad plain can be seen the grey, ivy-covered towers and ramparts of the castle of Champtocé, mentioned earlier. Looking further down the river, now become a vast sheet of water with already something of the character of an estuary, you notice the thin, frail suspension bridge, and further on the white houses of Ingrandes, a town noted for its wines, which marks the boundary between Anjou and Brittany. The shipping

here increases, and strings of barges are met with slinking downstream to Nantes. Below Ingrandes the river separates itself into many channels divided by islands, bordered by lines of willows and osiers, which are highly cultivated. Each group of islands is succeeded by a broad and peaceful reach.

Some miles below Ingrandes rises a steep hill, on the left bank, covered with red roofs surrounding a high tower topped by a spherical dome, the whole set in a green frame of trees. This is the interesting village of St. Florent-le-Vieil, which presents a very picturesque appearance with its crown of broken ramparts, its festoons of climbing plants, its terrace bordered with trees, and its pleasant church. It was at St. Florent that the war of La Vendée—whose traces are so frequently met with throughout this part of the Loire valley—first started. The peasants, on the 28th of March, 1793, refused to obey the conscription which sought to send them to defend their country on its eastern frontier. They repulsed the soldiers of the Convention sent to force their compliance with the order and chose for their leader the pious sacristan of Le Pin-en-Mauges, Cathelineau, called the *Saint de l'Anjou*. The tomb of Cathelineau's successor, Bonchamps, is in the church of St. Florent.

A line of sand at the foot of the hill gives quite a marine appearance to the village, which is added to by the fishermen often seen here in the act of drawing in their long nets. Opposite St. Florent is Varades, a mile and a half away, which is connected with the town by an omnibus service.

Once again the cliff, high and verdant, turns away

from the stream, which now flows majestically between low banks. Then come a succession of islands, large and small, their banks bordered with long lines of stately poplar trees—a wide and splendid landscape. Then, after l'Ile Briand, l'Ile Kerguelen, l'Ile Boire-



St. Florent-le-Vieil

Rousse, l'Ile aux Moines and l'Ile Lefèvre, and many lesser islets, rises the little port of Ancenis.

Of all delicious places in a most lovely district, Ancenis is surely the most charming. It has about five thousand people, and a garrison to lend it a touch

of colour and gaiety. Its streets run, narrow and winding, up the hill ; and there is a view across the river—more than a quarter of a mile wide here—from some old ramparts, from which it is hard to tear oneself away. The Loire just below the town is sprinkled with islands ; and the valley is a mile in breadth, enclosed by a series of low hills whose summits are crowned with windmills. On the horizon, here and there, pointed stone spires detach themselves. When you look at Ancenis from the left bank, before crossing the long suspension bridge, the grouping of the little town appears admirable. Above the port are the remains of the old castle—some ramparts, two dismantled towers flanking a gateway, and a few Renaissance buildings ; on the right is the church and on the left the square containing Du Bellay's statue. Then, at the top of the hill, is a jumble of quaint houses, whose slate roofs contrast with their chimneys of red tile. To the left is an eighteenth-century château, incorporating some older parts. A broad promenade of chestnut trees, the white blossoms alternating with the red, separates the town from the river and affords a black and welcome shade. Ancenis is indeed a fit place to have bred so sweet a poet as Joachim du Bellay. He was not, it should be mentioned, born actually in the town, but on the left bank of the river some miles south, at the Château de la Turmelière, whose ruins are still to be seen in the park of the modern château of that name. This château is within the confines of the village of Liré, at the mouth of the small stream similarly called, and on a hill above the Loire. The Loire, the sweetness of his gentle province of Anjou, his own home and pleasant village, du Bellay

constantly celebrated in his sonnet-sequences, "L'Olive" and "Les Regrets," and elsewhere. Few poets have been more passionately attached to the district in which they lived, or with more reason. He constantly "regrets" Anjou :

" Mes antiques amis, mon plus riche trésor,
Et le plaisant séjour de ma terre Angevine.
Je regrette les bois, et les champs blondissans
Les vignes, les jardins, et les prez verdissans,
Que mon fleuve traverse. . . ."

And in one of his famous sonnets he asks :

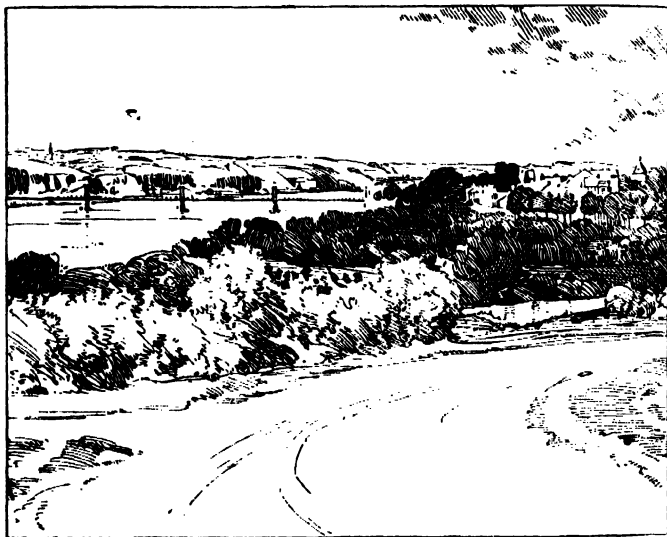
" Quand revoiray-je, hélas, de mon petit village
Fumer la cheminée ; et en quelle saison
Revoiray-je le clos de ma pauvre maison,
Qui m'est une province, et beaucoup d'avantage ?
Plus me plaist le séjour qu'ont hasty mes ayeux,
Que des palais Romaines le front audacieux :
Plus que le marbre dur me plaist l'ardoise fine,
Plus mon Loyre Gaulois, que le Tybre Latin,
Plus mon petit Lyré, que le mont Palatin,
Et plus que l'air marin la douceur Angevine."

Du Bellay died in 1560, at the age of thirty-six. A literary pilgrimage which I regret not having undertaken is to the site of his house at Liré.

Below Ancenis the Loire splits itself among a new group of islands ending in a long green strip called l'Ile Neuve. Then, where Champtoceaux on the left bank looks across at Oudon, the river is crossed by a great steel bridge. At the southern end of it, after passing the ruins of a feudal mill, the road rises *en corniche*, up the rocky hillside splendidly covered with chestnut trees, walnuts, firs, and cedars. The views of the river valley from here are exceptionally fine. The village of Champtoceaux spreads itself along the top of this hill.

The church is modern, but at the foot of the hill and actually in the stream itself, are some curious ruins of an old castle, consisting of the remains of towers, and two pointed archways.

On the other side of the river is Oudon, with its fine octagonal tower, five stories high. I say fine ; but its



At Ancenis

“restoration” really deprives it of all interest except as a point in the landscape, when seen from a distance. The cliffs which border the river below Oudon are covered with firs and pine trees ; and in this sombre and majestic setting is a very good mock castle which makes quite a picturesque addition to the scenery. It goes by the name of the Folie-Siffait, and was put up by a public-spirited merchant of Nantes to

give employment to poor workpeople during a time of famine.

The gorge through which the river runs between Oudon and Champtoceaux, and below these two places, is extraordinarily fine and at the same time little known—towering rocks on the right bank, wooded hills on the left, and both sides rich in finely placed castles.

Among those on the right bank is the château of Clermont, built of brick faced with stone, and opposite it, its white turrets detaching themselves clearly against a background of the most vivid green woodland, is the château of La Varenne. The hill on which this splendid house stands is the last of those on the left bank, which henceforward becomes flat and monotonous. The right bank, however, maintains a majestic line of cliffs until a little way beyond Mauves, after which it, too, becomes flat, and the river flows on through low reed-fringed margins to the sea.

Mauves brings to a magnificent end a magnificent stretch of river scenery, scenery which inspired Turner to make a lovely series of water-colour drawings, many of which were presented by Ruskin to the Ashmolean Gallery at Oxford. The cliffs of Mauves are particularly fine, rising out of the river like the huge wall of a fortress. And a dozen miles further on, in the midst of a broad plain, lies the great capital of Brittany—Nantes.

CHAPTER XX

NANTES

NOT even the rain, which greeted me at Nantes as it had greeted me at Angers, could do anything to cool my sudden and unreasoning excitement. No place that I had yet seen had possessed quite such an arresting atmosphere of romance. The tall houses towered up under a grey sky ; above them, on rising ground, rose the dark, rather ragged walls of the cathedral behind which lowered a bank of black clouds. There was a coming and going of reddish-brown tramcars along the slippery streets ; there were views of masts, of a distant *pont transbordeur*, of an arm of water, and beyond it, on an island, of the twin towers of a great biscuit factory. Commerce, shipping, energy, wealth, a long and passionate history, a pulsing, vivid life : all these things seem to blend at Nantes, combining to create an effect quite singular.

As it was so wet I took the first hotel that came, and asked for a top room ; I had not realised that houses could be so high. The steep ascent was made by a wide stone staircase with iron railings, lit by square windows, up which the *garçon* slipped like a kind of ape in his silent felt slippers. At each landing, dark passages branched off to the right and to the left.

When we got to the top the ceiling was unexpectedly low, and the walls were distempered, I remember, in the kind of pink which is used in "institutions." I was shown into a broad, low room, comfortable enough, and spotlessly clean.

It would have been a very ordinary room but for one transforming characteristic—its window. When I first entered it this was closed up and white curtains shut out the view. But when once it had been thrown wide open, the difference was almost miraculous. The window opened well above the surrounding roofs ; it looked down on them, over them ; it was dizzily high. Underneath I could see the tops of umbrellas ; pigmy people hurrying to and fro ; and, across an expanse of glistening slate roofs streaming with water, rose on the top of a slight hill the dark mass of the cathedral. Down on the left, by the quay, I noticed the tops of a group of towers which I imagined to be the castle ; and straight in front of me, as far as I could see, was an undulating expanse of gleaming blue-roofed houses, broken up by spires and towers, and, in the distance, by the aerial tracery of the *pont transbordeur*, and by a lovely entanglement of masts.

From that giddy perch, in that curious hotel—whose name was, I fancy, connected in some way with the Anne of Brittany who married two kings of France, and of whom I had met with so many traces in my journey down the valley of the Loire—I could have remained looking, without weariness, the whole afternoon. But after a while a sudden patch of cloud-flocked blue appeared in the sky above the cathedral, the blue increased gradually, and a shaft of pale sunlight shone

out from behind a bank of cloud and made the wet roofs gleam. Then the rain stopped, the sun grew stronger, burst finally through, and flooded the great sea of dripping houses with gold, so that they glittered and shone. I rushed down the steep stone staircase, out into the soft, cool air, which was fragrant and delicious after the rain.

I liked Nantes so much, and so immediately, that I hesitated as long as I could before attempting any general exploration; tasted the place, as it were, in sips. That first afternoon I went up the hill at the back of my hotel to the Musée de Peinture, a great new block of masonry, occupying a long site between two streets, the rue Gambetta and the rue du Lycée, and opening on the latter. It lies north of the station, and a little east of the cathedral, from which it is separated by the broad, tree-lined Cours St. Pierre. Inside is a great air of spaciousness and clean white marble: it is a building which could house worthily a vast collection. There are over a thousand pictures as it is, but the collection would be a more pleasing one to visit if more than half of them were gone. At present the interesting pictures are apt to be obscured by large canvases marked "Medaillé à l'Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900," which a paternal Government, kind only to be cruel, has purchased and presented. Perhaps the gorgeousness of the gallery in which the pictures are housed accounted for a disappointment which seems now a little unreasonable. I find from my notebook that there were quite a number of memorable things. Among them was a curious Alfred Stevens, reminding me of one of those at Brussels; a storm at

sea with a steamer wrestling with it under a curious, plum-coloured sky which gives quite a grandiose effect. Then there were some interesting Watteaus—"Pierrot," "Harlequin," "Columbine," and a picture showing a singular group of elegant persons, carrying guns under their arms, and moving across the canvas, outlined against a curious dull sky. It was called "*Fantassins*." I noticed also a Lancret, a portrait of La Camargo, apparently a copy of the one in the Wallace Collection; a Raffaelli ("Ragpicker Lighting his Pipe"); a charming, romantic landscape of the seventeenth century, by Jacques Fouquière; a portrait by Bronzino, of a pretty boy with dark brown eyes and curling dark hair; two delightful angels (one of whom has red hair) by G. Delatour; some Moors on horseback by Diaz; an unexpected Greuze, portrait of a young Dignitary of the Church, in a curled wig and red robes; a pleasant autumnal landscape, showing a lake with swans on it, in a setting of trees with reddish yellow leaves, by Boyer; a Delacroix; and a wonderful portrait, without name or number by which to identify it, of a woman with a white fan. There were also several charming pieces of artificiality, dating from the reign of Louis Quinze, of which one of the most noticeable was a *Danseuse*, by Schaall—rather a chocolate-box affair, but more delightful than one thought it ought to be. It shows a woman who is throwing out her (rather stumpy) arms in a conventional attitude of the ballet; she stands, elaborately dressed, in a cleverly suggested landscape, with one long, slender, exquisitely shod foot put a little forward. Her frock is delicious. The round bodice, like a tube, tapering to the waist, is a dove-coloured grey; from

the waist spring crinoline-like flounces of pink and yellow and white ; while a pale gauzy turban, tipped with a pink rose, half concealed, crowns a head coquettishly bent a little to one side. It is not in the best taste of its day, but the workmanship of it is extraordinarily sure and brilliant.

I find that I have left to the end perhaps the most striking picture in the whole gallery—Ingres' portrait of Mme. de Senonnes. It is amazing how effective all Ingres' pictures manage to be. This portrait, though it does not immediately entice, claims attention with absolute confidence. The lady is seated a little forward to catch the light, on a yellow, plush-covered sofa, with a shadowed looking-glass at her back. The sheen on the velvet of her deep red dress, with its flesh-coloured yoke showing the admirable swell of the bosom ; the frilled lace collar ; the fringe of lace at the wrists ; the rings—every detail is rendered with completeness and accuracy, with a meticulousness, perhaps, which only the great distinction of the whole design could carry off and wear gracefully.

I have a great affection for commemorative columns, and, emerging from the Musée into the Cours St. Pierre, I perceived one with delight, at the top of the hill in front of me. It stands about ninety feet high, in the middle of the elegant place Louis XVI, and is surmounted by a statue of that monarch which one would not have expected the Revolution to have spared. It seems odd that anyone should have bothered to erect a statue to the poor man, and the explanation of its still being there may lie in the fact of its atrocious badness. Beyond this pleasant square, which forms a kind of

central plateau up to which the roads lead, is the Cours St. André. This is a pleasant avenue, broad, well-shaded



The Cathedral, Nantes

with chestnut trees, and beloved of nursemaids and young ladies with dogs, which slopes down to the Erdre,

one of the several tributaries of the Loire which join it at Nantes. The Cours St. Pierre, descending the other slope of the little hill of which the place Louis XVI is the summit, passes the choir of the cathedral, and sinks down to the quays by the château.

I explored the cathedral with great delight, for its west front with its two squat towers has a pleasantly ruinous, unrestored look. The nave, rebuilt in the fifteenth century, is very lofty and graceful; the choir has been added recently.

But the chief glories of Nantes Cathedral are its two admirable tombs. That in the south transept to Frederick, the last Duke of Brittany, and Marguerite de Roix his wife, is an elaborate Renaissance work, by Michel Colomb, dating from 1507. It is in black and white marble, like the tomb of the children of Anne of Brittany at Tours, by the same hand. The second fine tomb is that to the Breton soldier General de Lamoricière, who fought for the Pope in the wars which led ultimately to a united Italy, and was honourably defeated at Castelfidardo. The statuary, some in white marble and the rest in bronze, is the masterpiece of a nineteenth-century sculptor—Paul Dubois.

All round the cathedral and in its immediate neighbourhood, are stately eighteenth-century houses, built of grey stone, all with large entresols, iron balcony rails, and classic pediments, with steep roofs of blue slate. These dignified houses are characteristic of a city which has so many opulent and dignified streets; and the quays, from the château almost to the Gare Maritime at the western end of the town, are lined with them also, so that Nantes has a splendid water front.

The castle, which is below the cathedral and close to the river, is in some ways not unlike that of Angers, but on a much smaller scale, and dates mainly from the end of the fifteenth century. Of the seven round towers it possessed originally, six still remain. The place is used now for some military purpose, but one is allowed to enter the court and examine the Grand Logis—a fine Renaissance building, which has been very thoroughly restored—and also the Salle des Gardes. The inside is not of great interest, but the place has such a prodigious mass of historical association that it is impossible to avoid something in the nature of a thrill. Unreasonably, since it is doubtful how this could be the prison from which the young man leapt into the Loire, I found myself humming the song which the genius of Mme. Guilbert has made so familiar :

“ Dans les prisons de Nantes
Il y a prisonnier,

Que personne ne va voire
Que la fille du geôlier.

Va lui porter à boire,
A boire et à manger.

—On dit part tout' la ville
Que demain vous mourrez.

—Las ! si demain je meure,
Déliez-moi les pieds.

Toutes les cloches de Nantes,
Se mirent à sonner.

La fillette est jeunette,
Elle se mit à pleurer.

Le prisonnier alerte,
Dans la Loire a sauté.

THE LOIRE

Quand il fut à la nage,
Il se mit à chanter :

—Vivent les filles de Nantes •
Et la fille au géôlier.

—Si je r'viens dans la ville
Ca s'ra pour l'épouser.”

The castle was originally the palace of the Dukes of Brittany, and passed with the province to the Crown of France when Anne of Brittany, aged eighteen, married Charles VIII.

It is curious how all down the lower part of the Loire, and all over Nantes, one meets Anne de Bretagne, her mark. Many of the popular songs, still sung, are full of her, as, for instance, the well-known “ C'était Anne de Bretagne ” :

“C'était Anne de Bretagne
Duchesse en sabots,
Revenant de ses domaines
En sabots mirlitontaines,
Ah, ah, ah,
Vivent les sabots de bois.

Voilà' qu' aux portes de Rennes
Avec des soldats
Trouva trois beaux capitaines,
etc.

Ils saluent leur souveraine,
Avec des sabots,
Lui donn'nt un pied de verveine,
etc.

S'il fleurit vous serez reine,
Avec des sabots,
Elle a fleuri, la verveine,
etc.

• La Duchesse Anne fut reine
Avec des sabots,
• Les Bretons sont dans la peine,
etc.

Les Bretons sont dans la peine
Avec des sabots ;
Ils n'ont plus de souveraine,
En sabots mirlitontaines,
Ah, ah, ah,
Vivent les sabots en bois."

The château has sheltered in its day many unwilling guests, from that arresting personality Gilles de Laval, Marshal de Retz, in 1440, to the Duchess de Berry, the mother of the Comte de Chambord, in 1832 ; while in the seventeenth century both Cardinal de Retz and Louis XIV's discredited Superintendent of Finance, Fouquet, were detained here. The most interesting of these prisoners is undoubtedly Gilles de Laval. This singular individual was born at Autun, in 1404, of an ancient Breton stock. His education, for the time in which he lived, was remarkable. He knew three languages, Latin, French, and Breton, had a considerable knowledge of chemistry, and was devoted to music and a skilled musician. When he was twenty-five he was sent by Charles VII to accompany Jeanne d'Arc, and fought by the side of the Maid with great brilliance at Jargeau and Patay, and at the relief of Orléans. Various attempts have been made to deprive the Devil of his due in this respect, but there seems no serious reason for doubting that his military career was much to his credit. After the war he settled down with his wife to live in great state, more like a sovereign than a mere nobleman, on one of the many rich properties which he owned in Touraine, Anjou and Brittany. He was immensely wealthy for his time, kept a regiment of soldiers attached to his person, and—for he was very fond of Catholic ceremonial—a whole retinue of priests, consisting of a dean and chanters.

It is recorded that he delighted in mystery plays, his favourite being that of the "Siege of Orléans," which recorded his own exploits. His signature, of which examples have been preserved, was very elaborate at this time, and he signed himself simply "Gilles," like a reigning monarch. To his contemporaries it must have seemed as though the earth had little more to offer him.

One of his biographers—Mr. Wilson, I fancy—describes him as showing "in his face, figure, and in every movement, his pride and spirit. He had a high rather than broad forehead, his nose was prominent and slightly aquiline; the nostrils were large and thin, and, on occasions of anger, spread and quivered in an interesting and threatening manner. His lips were rather thin, but well-coloured, and had a tinge of delicate and refined sensuality." His complexion was fair, his eyes large and blue, and his eyebrows and lashes long and black. His hair also was long and black, and his beard the same. It was soft, and with its raven blackness, became shiny, giving it a bluish sheen, which doubtless gave him the nickname of Bluebeard, by which his memory is preserved in nursery legends and stories. "His fingers," we are told, "were long and tapering, his hands small, and their fair complexion, when brought into contact with his velvet costume and lace ruffles, showed them to good advantage."

Michelet describes him as being of "bon entendment, belle personne et bonne façon, lettré de plus, et appréciant fort ce, qui parlaient avec élégance la langue latine."

Gradually about this splendid personage the most sinister rumours began to gather. There were extra-

ordinary stories of dealings with the devil, wizardry and spirit-raising. The district in which he lived seemed as though ravaged by some supernatural monster who devoured the young and was himself invisible. Young boys and girls, of ages ranging from six to sixteen and older, sent on errands by their mothers in neighbouring villages, mysteriously disappeared, and were never seen or heard of again. Then it was noticed that many of the lost children had been observed before their disappearance speaking to Gilles de Retz, or to one of his creatures, or had been seen to visit his castle ; sometimes it was his very pages who disappeared.

At the time of his worst excesses he was living at his gloomy Breton château of Montcerneau, near Nantes, of which now only a few blackened ruins remain. Two women, wives of his friends, actually watched him assist in the removal of the bones of sixty children, in the dead of night, from one of the dungeons of the castle. In the year 1440 the popular indignation was voiced by the ecclesiastical authorities, and the highly-placed criminal was seized and brought to the castle of Nantes for trial. His long confession, a translation of which is given by Mr. Wilson, makes curious reading. He owns, in the course of it, that he has stolen very many boys, and put them to death, sometimes himself, sometimes through the agency of Stephen Corillaud, Henriët, Lord Roger Briqueville, and others. " He confessed to have killed these boys by various modes of torture, some by amputation and separation of their heads from their bodies, using daggers and poniards or knives ; others, however, with sticks or other implements for striking, by beating them on the head with violent blows ; others,

again, by tying them with cords, and fastening them to some door or iron hook . . . in his own room, that they might be strangled and languish."

The languishing part seems to have afforded him particular pleasure. "After their death he took delight in kissing, in gazing intently at those who had the more beautifully formed heads, and in cruelly opening, or causing to be opened, their bodies, that he might see their interior; and that, frequently, whilst these boys were dying, he would sit on their stomachs and take great pleasure in seeing them thus dying, and that he used to laugh heartily at the sight with the said Henriette and the said Corillaud. The corpses he caused afterwards to be buried or reduced to ashes." He seems to have been quite vague as to the number of his victims, which has been computed, however, as over a couple of hundred. To say that these children were sacrificed to Moloch, seems to have been more than an empty term. The abominable rites would appear to have had not only a sexual, but an occult significance, and to have been mixed up with what for want of a more specific term, may be called his dealings with the devil. His confession gives a long account of how he raised a certain demon called *Barron*, with the aid of an Italian from Lombardy, one François Prelati, who carried about his person a book which contained many names of demons and formulæ for conjurations. The invocations took place always inside a circle chalked on the floor, which also was marked with a cross and other signs. A long account is given in the confession of the details of an elaborate bargain which he made with the devil, or rather with a devil, through the medium of another of his wizards,

called Mesnill. Mesnill informed Gilles, in the words of the confession, that, "in order to do and fulfil the things which the said defendant intended to ask and obtain from the said devil, the said devil desired to receive from the said defendant a grant, written and made by him, defendant, with his own hand, and signed with the blood of one of his fingers, in which grant the aforesaid defendant should promise to give to the said devil whenever he appeared during the invocation of the said defendant, certain things which he, defendant, could not remember ; and that the same defendant, for this purpose and end, signed the said grant with his own hand, with blood drawn from his little finger, and subjoined his own name to the said grant. That he could not accurately remember the other statements contained in this grant, except that he promised by the honour of the said grant to deliver up to the said devil the articles mentioned in the grant, provided that the devil would give or grant the same Gilles, knowledge, power, and riches. But the defendant is quite certain, as he says, that whatsoever he may have promised the devil by this or other grants, he always and decidedly made exception of, and reserved his soul and his life. And he says that this grant was not handed to the devil at this time, since he did not appear to the said Gilles, defendant, at or during the said incantation." One wonders whether the lives of children were among the articles that Gilles failed to remember, which were to be delivered up to the said devil.

In the face of such a singular career mere terms of abuse seem grotesquely inadequate. It remains to be said that this inhuman individual, in spite of all his

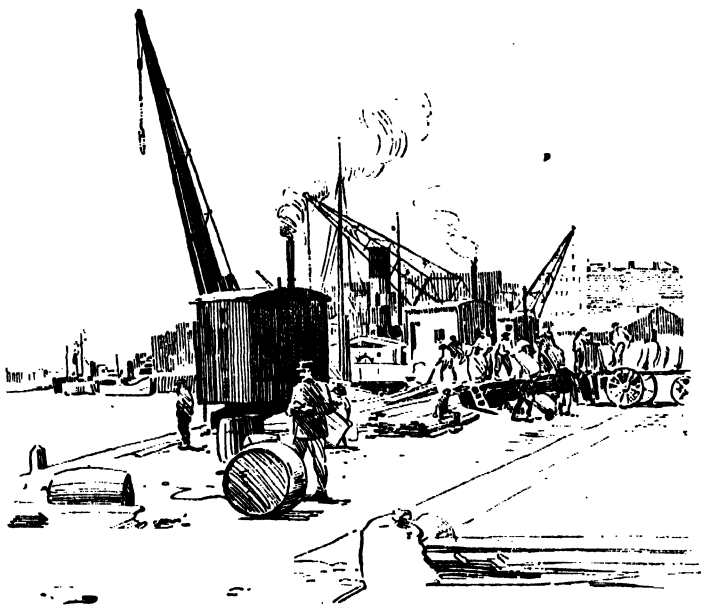
strange intimacy with some supernatural underworld, was made by the mass of his normal contemporaries to undergo the death penalty. He was hanged up and burned while still alive, on the gibbet of Piesse—a little open prairie on the island of la Madeleine, in the Loire, reached by two bridges communicating with the place Bouffoy—on October 26th, 1440.

A greater effect of sheer criminality, perhaps because it lacks that touch of the abnormal which characterised Gilles de Retz, is produced by the memory of the doings of the infamous Carrier in 1793. The worst of these may not have taken place actually in the castle, but must have been observable from the windows of some of the massive eighteenth-century houses which line the quays just beyond it. Carrier was a kind of Judge Jefferies of the Revolution. Although Nantes had been strongly on the side of progress from the first, and had successfully resisted the attacks of the Royalists of la Vendée, the Comité du Salut Public sent him down to suppress that rebellion. The Bloody Assizes which succeeded the rebellion of Monmouth at the end of the seventeenth century were as nothing compared with Carrier's proceedings at the end of the eighteenth. Swinburne's fine poem occurs at once to the memory, describing how :

“Carrier came down to the Loire and slew
Till all the ways and the waves waxed red :
Bound and drowned, slaying two by two,
Maidens and young men, naked and wed.”

The Vendean prisoners were executed without trial. First, the victims were beheaded as quickly as the executioner could turn them off. Then, as this method was too slow, they were stood against a wall and shot at

by the soldiery in parties of hundreds at a time. Even this was not sufficient to gratify Carrier's lust for blood, and he finally revived, in a more awful form, the *noyades* that were first employed at Amboise. Barges full of prisoners were floated out into the middle of the Loire, and then scuttled. In four months between



On the Quay, Nantes

six and nine thousand men and women were killed, without trial, by Carrier's orders. It is pleasant to know that soon afterwards he was himself denounced and guillotined.

A single railway line, connecting the terminus with the line for St. Nazaire and Le Croisic, runs along the quay by the waterside. Beyond it, and opposite the château, is the Ile Gloriette, a rather dismal island,

given over mostly to factories, and containing a large hospital, and further on still are some prettier islands. Under the wing, so to speak, of l'Ile Gloriette is a tiny islet on the Nantes side, called the Ile Feydeau, just opposite the place du Commerce and the large post office, at the point where the canalised Erdre flows into the Loire. The houses on this islet, along the Quai Duguay-Trouin, are very picturesque; they lean against one another at curious angles, and are all out of the straight, as though a mild earthquake had shaken them up. The waterways here are full of different kinds of river craft, especially the Erdre, which, whenever I came across it (and it almost bisects the middle of the town) was literally choked with barges, many of which were filled with sawn planks. You could hardly see the water at all, for the barges filled every inch of space. Opposite the western end of the Ile Feydeau, the prosperous-looking Bourse with its classic columns, looks on to a scene of great animation, always crowded with people, where the trams cross and re-cross. To the west of it the straight, imposing rue Jean Jacques Rousseau leads uphill to the circular place Graslin, which is the hub of the town. I remember very vividly climbing that hill for the first time. It was early in the evening of a day which had been raining but had cleared, and the sombre lines of stone houses, many stories high, looked almost black as they converged to a point at the top, where the sky made a sudden glorious splash of the brightest pink. From all sides the roads, broad or narrow, climb up to the place Graslin, whose position in this respect is not unlike that of the place Sadi Carnot at Marseilles, though

the former is far more magnificent. It is most dignified and splendid, and surrounded by heavy stone houses. On the west side is the gloomy Hôtel de France, with a huge, cavernous café under it. Here, by the way, are to be found an excellent orchestra and English illustrated papers. By its side is the theatre, a classical building with heavy Corinthian columns, and adorned with statues of eight muses on its roof. I remember, while I was drinking my *apéritif*, writing down on the back of an envelope (which I have unfortunately lost) the long, pompous inscription, relating how the theatre was completed in 1791, and opened under the patronage of King Louis XVI, the Duke of Somewhere being the Governor, and the Duke of Somewhere else being the Intendant. And Carrier's exploits took place only two years later! Down the rue Crébillon, in front of me, I could just see the fountain in the middle of the place Royale, another centre of animation, containing a good café with a band, whose name I forget. Between the rue Crébillon and the rue Jean Jacques Rousseau was another café, on the other side of the square, the Café de l'Univers, and at the south-west corner was the Café de la Cigale, which seemed to be a supper-place. At the back of the latter, rather hidden and very quiet, was one of the most splendid squares that I have ever seen in any town—the Cours Cambronne or Cours de la République. I see that I have called it a square; it was, strictly speaking, oblong—a garden, full of the greenest, softest trees, surrounded on all sides by majestic *hôtels* built in the early part of the eighteenth century, with long, even rows of windows and heavy stone pediments. The sandy gravel paths under the

chestnut trees were a rich brown after the rain, and the freshened leaves of the trees were radiantly green. Not a sound from the busy streets outside disturbed the stillness. The rows of dignified windows looked down on to the garden without there being a sign of movement in any of them; and the rather weather-beaten stonework of the houses had a mellow look which seemed to enhance the atmosphere of peace. The age recalled was not, perhaps, very remote; but it seemed possible here to re-create for oneself the Nantes of the last days of the French Monarchy, when the place Graslin was new, the imposing theatre just built—the Nantes which Arthur Young visited and described. Young, by the way, went (when he arrived) to the theatre with commendable speed, and was much struck by the contrast between the misery of the surrounding country-side and the splendour of the Breton capital. “Arrive—go to the theatre, new built of fine white stone, and has a magnificent portico front of eight elegant Corinthian pillars, and four others within, to part the portico from a grand vestibule. Within all is gold and painting, and a *coup d’œil* at entering, that struck me forcibly. It is, I believe, twice as large as Drury Lane, and five times as magnificent. It was Sunday, and therefore full. *Mon Dieu!* cried I to myself, do all the wastes, the deserts, the heath, ling, furze, broom, and bog that I have passed for three hundred miles lead to this spectacle? What a miracle, that all this splendour and wealth of the cities in France should be so unconnected with the country! There are no gentle transitions from ease to comfort, from comfort to wealth; you pass at once from beggary to profusion—

from misery in mud cabins to Mlle. St. Huberti, in splendid spectacles at 500 liv. a night. The country deserted, or, if a gentleman in it, you find him in some wretched hole, to save that money which is lavished with profusion in the luxuries of a capital." It is perhaps no wonder that he remarks later that he found Nantes "as *enflammé* in the cause of liberty as any town in France can be."

Of the evening amusements of Nantes I cannot speak with much authority; I did not explore the town thoroughly in this respect. One resort alone I remember with any distinctness, and that is the "Petit Casino Nantais," which lurks in a side street below the Grand Théâtre, heralded by a round white globe of gas above its door. It is a kind of tenth-rate music-hall, to which the right of admission is obtained by the purchase of an inexpensive *bock*; a big room covered with chairs and tables, with a stage at one end. On the evening of my visit there was nearly a riot. The audience consisted of several groups of nondescript men, and a rather dowdy contingent of *demi-mondaines*, each of whom nursed a little toy dog on her lap.

Whenever "Miss Cri-Cri," a pallid young lady, attempted with her lamentably inefficient, metallic voice some sentimental ballad that Paris tired of ten years back, the little dogs would bark with one accord. Miss Cri-Cri would then stand looking piteously at the audience; though, indeed, she ought to have known that the French audience has no pity. The little Jew proprietor, when the barking began, would rush out from behind the wings, gesticulating. But as soon as he appeared each little dog closed its eyes, put on a demure

expression, and buried its little cold nose in its mistress's muff. It was impossible to spot the culprit. No sooner, however, was the Hebrew once more behind the scenes and Miss Cri-Cri in the middle of another lamentable verse, than they would begin again, louder than ever, with their little sharp, fierce yelps. The audience took sides. Some appealed chivalrously for Miss Cri-Cri, others, out of *méchanceté*, sided with the little dogs, and chaffed the now half-frenzied proprietor. Miss Cri-Cri gave up the unequal struggle, and I left Condé (the star turn) trying to rally the company round the tricolour in a stirring patriotic ballad. I have been in many music-halls since which have made me recall, regretfully, those wicked "poms."

CHAPTER XXI

TO ST. NAZAIRE

THE Loire at Nantes splits itself into six arms, divided by islands: the town lies chiefly on the north side, that is to say, on the right bank. The animation all along the waterways bordered by the great quays is considerable. An excellent fleet of little steamers carrying passengers from point to point dash about with an air of hurry; flotillas of black, half-submerged barges swoop down behind a tug, or are dragged uneasily upstream. Nantes was once one of the most considerable ports of France; but its approach is now not wide enough for the larger vessels, which put in, instead, at St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the estuary. But heavy coal-tramps, odd craft of moderate size, barges and fine sailing-ships line the wharves and make the walk along the quays, especially beyond the Bourse, full of colour, movement, and interest. Nantes has still some of that fine flavour which attaches to its name in the innumerable ballads which enshrine its legends and traditions. The sight of a brig coming into the port under sail made one think of that breezy old song, with its jolly refrain that dips and rises like a yacht in the bay, which opens:

“ A Nant's, à Nant's est arrivé,
Saute, blonde, et lève le pied,
Trois beaux navir's chargés de blé,
Saute, blonde, ma joli' blonde,
Saute, blonde, et lève le pied.

Three ladies go down to them to buy corn : • .

Trois dam's, s'en vont les marchander,

and—as they are beautiful—they are promptly carried off by the high-spirited sailors. The ladies weep and wail and say they can hear their children crying for them on shore.

“ You never had any children ! ” laugh the mariners ; and the last verse ends :

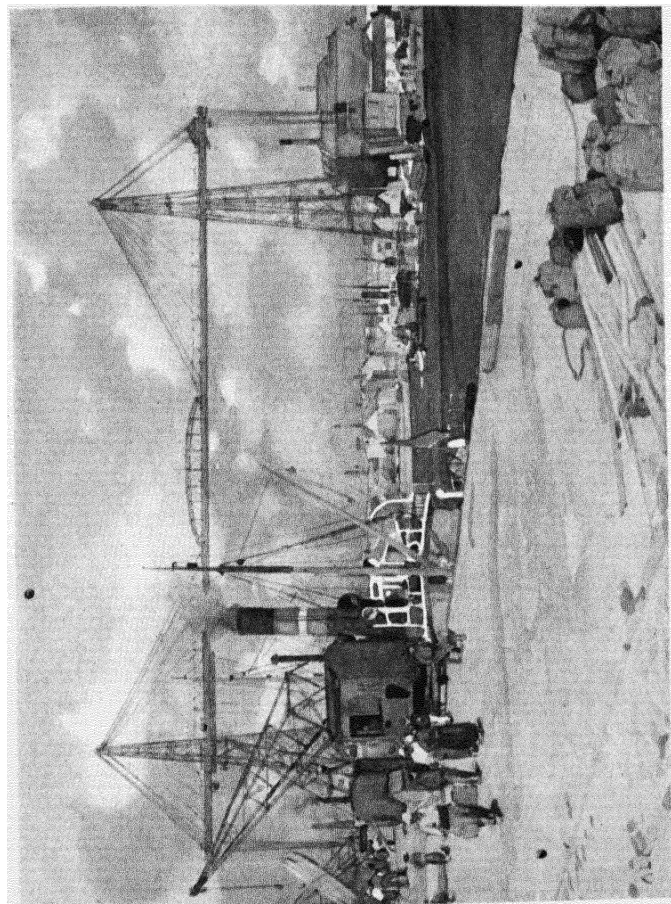
S'il plait à Dieu, vous en aurez,
Saute, blonde, ma joli' blonde,
Saute, blonde, et lève le pied.”

There are many sailor-songs connected with Nantes, many more indecorous than the above—such, for instance, as “ Les Trois Matelots de Nantes,” and the “ Chanson des Mariniers ”—but few so amusing.

From Nantes there is a regular service of steamers running daily to St. Nazaire, touching on the way at Chantenay, Basse-Indre, Indret, Couëron, le Pellerin, le Migron, and Paimbœuf, which start from the piers of the Compagnie Bretonne just below the Bourse.

From here I began the last stage of my journey down the river, at eight o'clock on a rainy August morning. I took my seat on the upper deck under the awning, on the little white steamer, the *Ville de Nantes*, and off we went downstream. The boat was full of elderly women in sabots, wearing white Breton caps and nursing large wicker baskets full of vegetables, and contained, besides a number of nondescript travellers, a little talkative hunchback in a black, hooded cloak.

We passed* the end of the Ile Gloriette with the rain



THE PONT-TRANSBORDEUR AT NANTES.

driving in under the awning, and then steamed by the picturesque ship-building yards on the Ile de la Madeleine, where the naked ribs of an iron vessel under construction looked rusty and desolate in the rain. On the right the stately line of stone houses bordering the quays slipped by us, partly obscured by a row of trucks which were being dragged to the main station by a panting engine. Against the wharf at the far western end of the town, under a low cliff, was moored a splendid three-masted sailing-vessel with swelling bows, a white mermaid for a figure-head and a long, tapering bowsprit. She looked as clean as a new pin, her sides were painted a pale, fresh green, and she hailed from some port in the Pacific. Her flag was unfamiliar, and had a bright patch of green in it.

After Nantes came Chantenay, two and a half miles down, with big factories and workshops; then the two little ports, standing back from the river, of Basse-Indre and Indret, with gleaming white churches with stone spires. Schooners with furled sails and a few small tugs and lighters were moored in their tiny harbours.

The river below Nantes becomes broader and broader, flowing between low banks fringed sometimes with tall reeds, sometimes with rows of poplars. Lines of low hills, crowned with windmills at regular intervals, accompany it (far in the background) on the northern side. There are numerous backwaters, forgotten channels, and harbours where half a dozen little sailing-vessels find anchorage; and islands are frequent. One of these, that of Indret—opposite the town of the same name on the left bank—contains some huge naval engineering workshops, known as l'Usine d'Indret (which

Young mentions), where marine engines are manufactured. At Couëron, on the right bank, three and a half miles further down, there are big glassworks and a mass of curious factory buildings too thrilling and (in their way) of too "romantic" an appearance to be condemned merely as ugly. The river would be far less interesting if it were not for these great works, whose very size lends them a certain grandeur.

The rain had cleared away now, and the sun shone again out of a cloudy and unsettled sky, making the whole landscape look wonderfully fresh. The waters of the river were a troubled yellow. We met just below Couëron a fine barque coming up the stream under sail, and several Sunderland coal-tramps, one of which I remembered having seen at Rouen (whose port is of rather similar capacity to Nantes) earlier in the year. We then touched at le Pellerin on the left bank, and at le Migron, which has opposite it Belle-Ile, the largest island of the Loire. The air now became filled with a kind of wild freshness; a black cloud round the sun made the wide expanse of water jet-black for a moment, and the wind furrowed it into tiny waves that became tipped with fringes of white foam, like flowers. The estuary soon became broader still. Turning to look back towards Nantes, we could see nothing before us save the white, swirling track left by the steamer, stretching away into the horizon across a limitless stretch of water. On either side were wide green plains bounded by low hills in the far distance, and dotted here and there with villages whose churches seemed all to be new or to have, at all events, new and glaring spires of white stone.

Then Paimbœuf ! The whole population seemed to have hurried on to the quay to look at us as we steamed up to the landing-stage ; about twenty men, that is to say, in different stages of laziness and undress, boys sprawling over the stone coping, contemplative old women with deeply wrinkled, apple-red cheeks, and merry girls who came tripping down with a healthy frankness to see what kind of a crowd this time the boat had brought them. The oddest air of desolation and decay hung over the little town, which sprawls—a long street of irregular white houses—along the river-bank. A stone jetty or mole runs out to protect its little port, now occupied only by a few small sailing-vessels and decrepit barges. Stranded on the mud was the bare side of an old mastless iron steamer from which the machinery had been removed. It was red and green with rust, slimy and disconsolate, and seemed cruelly to emphasise the fact that Paimbœuf has had its day. Before St. Nazaire rose into prominence Paimbœuf was the port of Nantes, but the treacherous river has filled its roadstead with sand. It is a dead town. The natives looked at us with interest, languid on the part of the men and eager on the part of the bright-eyed girls, but no one boarded the boat or left it, and in a few minutes we swung off again, and leaving on our right Donges, with its white church, made across the wide estuary to St. Nazaire. It was like the sea now. Afar in the distance we could discern across the dark water, all flecked with foam, romantic chimneys, the spars of ships ; and further to the left, a white dream-city. The prospect took on that splendour, that kind of unearthly magnificence which the sea only can give ; a magnificence which Turner knew

so wonderfully how to convey to his canvas. No town has ever given me such an impression of romantic wonder as did St. Nazaire, approached by water. A shaft of sunlight escaping from behind a rain-cloud made it gleam with a radiance as of some other world, while the great waste of water remained a soot-like black—a striking contrast. And nothing that I had seen hitherto



Paimbœuf

had so impressed me with the power and importance of the river which I had traced from a tiny rill in the far-off Ceyennes, up through the heart of France to this vast estuary. In a few minutes my long journey would be done, my vow accomplished.

But as the *Ville de Nantes* grew nearer and nearer to St. Nazaire the rich glow of my excitement noticeably cooled. Light, alas, is a magician; imagination a

skilled architect. The chimneys and factories just outside the town, and the network of masts and spars of the shipping in the docks, were fine enough—but St. Nazaire itself dwindled in the coldness of actuality to a poor, dull, squalid place.

Its streets cross one another at right angles—wide, new boulevards of a desolating lack of interest. The place gives the impression of being much smaller than it is—it boasts really more than 30,000 people—and has a mushroom air that is in marked contrast to that atmosphere of old establishment exhaled by Nantes. It is bleak, too, set in a plain and bounded by a yellow flood, half sea, half estuary. Yet, near it, to the north, are the seaside “resorts” of Batz, le Pouliguen, and le Croisic, and the old town of Guérande, still surrounded by its fifteenth-century walls; while to the south of it, across the river-mouth and beyond the Pointe de St. Gildas, stands Pornic, now a fashionable summer bathing-place, where Browning laid the scene of his “Fifine at the Fair.”

After all, one reflected, St. Nazaire is in Brittany; it has no right to such an “American” air. Down by the rocks surrounding the lighthouse of Villès-Martin, some way out of the town to the north, along the boulevard de l’Océan, I saw a charming Breton girl in a ribboned cap—for all the world like the “Belle du Village” of the song:

“Voyez-moi cheminant sur mon âne,
Coiffée de mon beau bonnet à rubans;
Ne suis-je pas belle?
Voyez-moi m’en allant à la messe,
Suivie de mes grandparents
S’en allant dodelinette, dodelinant”

Les beaux gas, mes amis du village,
Vous qui me croyez volage,
Je ne le suis pas.
Nul de vous ne m'aura pour épouse,
Car je serais jalouse.
De me voir délaissée, je ne le veux."

Better than the town with its wide, straight roads promenaded by groups of sailor-men, better than the miles of quays surrounding the great basins (in which lie the South American liners of the Compagnie Transatlantique) or the landing-stage which faces the opposite bank of the river, I liked this "sea-front" which looked across a limitless expanse of brown water. Now and then a big steamer would rise up on the horizon heralded by a line of smoke; or a sailing-vessel, seeming to move so slowly as almost to be becalmed, would gradually indicate its approach by a swelling in size, until, by imperceptible degrees, it came almost within hail. Looking out like that towards the west, one could amuse oneself idly by drawing a comparison between the life of the river, which knew no death but only a merging with something infinitely greater than itself, and our human life. The Loire had throughout its course been curiously human; capricious, extravagant, given to sudden rages and moments of a gracious golden charm. Here at St. Nazaire it had not died, come to a full-stop, but changed and become one with the sea, like a soul which has reached Nirvana; or, to take an example from another faith, a soul which, after the sufferings of purgatory, has reached perfection and become part of the Body of Christ, merging its "personality" in an all-embracing personality, ampler even than the ocean.

The sun went down over the waters in a crimson

glory which seemed to suffuse them with blood; then the sky became softened, with curious tints of green, and a veil of dove-like grey.

I walked for hours thus along the shore to the north of the town; inland was the wide plain, the "lande" stretching far to the north and east, where the *paludiers* were to be seen at work. These marsh-men, workers in the salt marshes or *marais saillants*, have curious customs and traditions and a remarkable though seldom-seen "costume." It consists of a black, half-moon-shaped hat framing the head, a dark, braided tunic open to the middle and disclosing a waistcoat and shirt of some white material, white knickerbockers with ribbons hanging from the knee, white stockings and curious rough shoes. I did not see anyone in the course of my ramble in this elaborate dress. Had I done so, I might have been tempted to the anti-climax of an additional week in Brittany!

As it was, I travelled straight back that night by the express, to Paris; my pilgrimage accomplished. But before I left the sea, to find my half-cold dinner in a gloomy inn, I had a memory to take away with me—plaintive and beautiful, with something in it of the sadness of life, life, which probably for everyone, everywhere, is bitterly full of forced surrenders and crushed longings. In the open door of a small cottage looking out to sea I watched a young girl who sat staring a little wistfully at the dying sun. As I got near, I could hear that she was singing to herself. She was singing, in a small, quite clear voice that had a natural "sob" in it more affecting than the

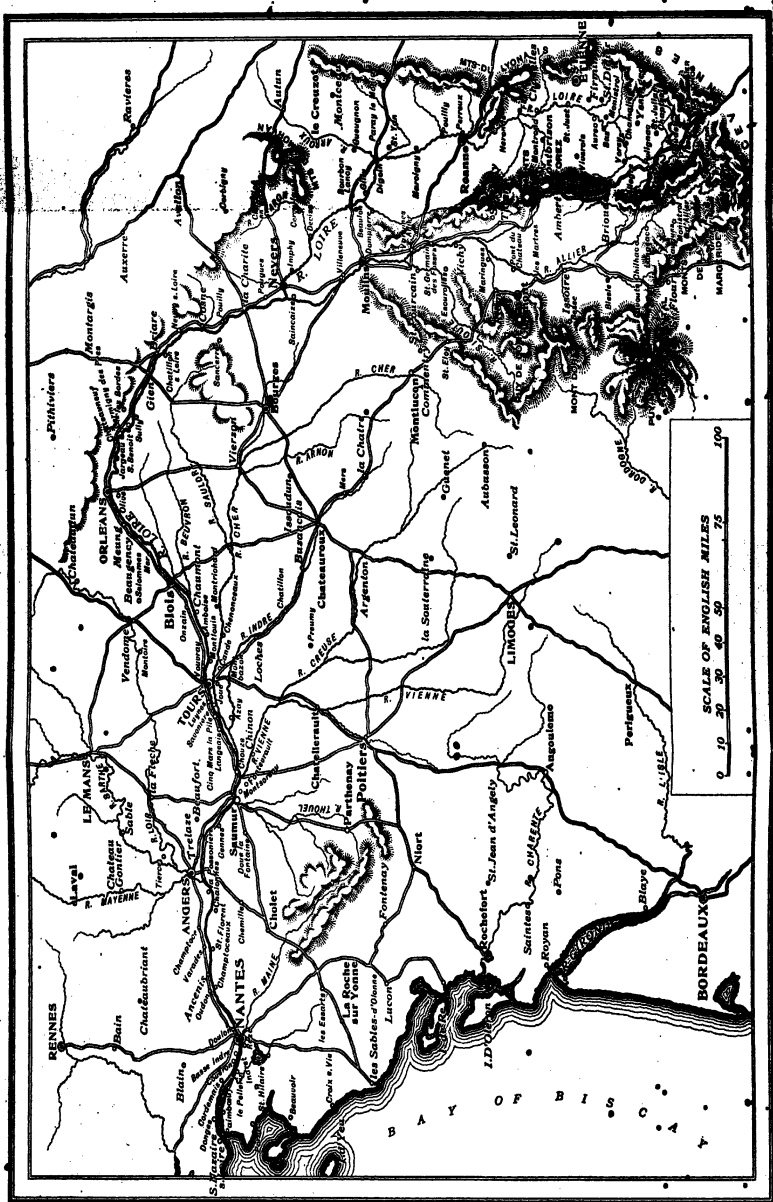
most florid hiccough of the Italian tenor, the naïve ballad of “Ma Douce Anette”:

“Ma douce Anette, par ce beau soir,
Viens sur la lande nous asseoir ;
C'est le printemps et la jonc fleurit,
Déjà les oiseaux font leurs nids—
Ma douce Anette, par ce beau soir,
Viens sur la lande nous asseoir.

Mon ami Pierre, laisse ma main,
Je ferai seule le chemin.
Nul ne prend garde aux oiseaux du bon Dieu,
Mais l'on médit des amoureux.
Mon ami Pierre, laisse ma main,
Je ferai seule le chemin.”

Faire seul le chemin—the wisest way, alas, is seldom the most alluring !

THE END



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